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SERMONS

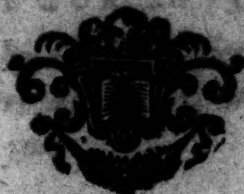
ON

Several SUBJECTS.

By the Most Reverend Father in GOD,
Dr. JOHN SHARP, late Lord
Archbishop of YORK.

Never before Printed, and now Publish'd
from his own PAPERS.

VOL. VI.



LONDON:

Printed for W. PARKER, at the *King's Head* in
St. Paul's Church-yard. M.DCC.XXXIV.

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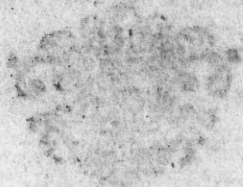
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DIS.

S E R M O N I.

*What Heresy is. Why permitted by
God. And the great Usefulness and
Advantages of it to the Church.*

Preached before the Prince of ORANGE,
Jan. 27, 1688.

1 COR. xi. 19.

*For there must be also Heresies among you,
that they which are approved may be made
manifest among you.*

T is a great Stumbling-block to
some among us, and almost
tempts them to doubt of the
Truth of our Religion, to see
how many Sects and Divisions
there are at this Day among Christians. The
removing this Stumbling-block is the Thing
I design at this Time; and my Text lays a
very good Foundation towards it; St. Paul
having several Ages ago told us, that there
must be Heresies, and withal given us a good

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Reason

Reason why there *must be*, viz. that *they which are approved may be made manifest.*

The Method I shall observe in treating on these Words, shall be as follows:

I. To give some Account of what is here meant by *Heresies*.

II. To shew how it comes to pass that there always *must be Heresies*.

III. To shew for what Reasons God permits *Heresies*, and what Purposes they serve.

IV. To make an Application of the whole.

I. I begin with the first Point, What is meant by *Heresies*. Now as to this, it is to be observed, that the Word *Heresy* is often to be met with in Scripture; and sometimes in that Sense in which it is commonly used by profane Authors, when it imports no more than some considerable Difference in Opinion, or such a Distinction of Men as to their Judgment, as makes them of a different Sect from the rest they converse with. And thus Christianity itself is styled a *Heresy* in the 28th of the *Acts*. But then it cannot be denied that the Word is often taken in a bad Sense, and undoubtedly

Serm. 12 *Against Heresy.* 1

it is so in my Text; and besides the bare Difference of Opinion, or being of a different Sect from others, denotes some great Fault in the Man that holds that Opinion, or that is of that Sect. Were it not thus, we cannot imagine that St. Paul, when he is reckoning up the Works of the Flesh, such as Murder and Adultery, and the like, should put in Heresy among them, as he doth in the 5th of *Galatians*. Well, now Ver. 10. the Question is, What is meant by *Heresy*, when it is taken in a bad Sense, when it is made one of *the Works of the Flesh*? Now, in answer to this, I say there are two Notions of Heresy in the New Testament, when that Word is taken in an ill Sense: For sometimes it is used with respect to the Christian Faith; and sometimes with respect to Christian Peace and Communion. Of both these I shall now give an Account.

1. Heresy is sometimes used with respect to the Christian Faith, and then the Notion of it is this: It is a Departure from, or a Renouncing of some necessary Article of the Christian Religion; and that not so much thro' Ignorance or Mistake, as from a vicious Principle, and for the serving some sensual Desires or Interests. This, I say, is the Notion of Heresy with reference to Faith, as far as we can judge from those Texts of Scripture which speak of it in this Sense. St. Peter thus describes Hereticks. 2 Pet. 2. 1. He tells us, that *as there were false Pro-*

Ver. 3.

Titus 3.

10, 11.

phets among the Jews, so there should be false Teachers among the Christians, who should privily bring in damnable Heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them: and thro' Covetousness, with feigned Words, making Merchandize of Souls. St. Paul also bids Titus to reject an Heretick, after the first and second Admonition, forasmuch as he that is such, is subverted and sinneth, being condemned of himself. These are the two principal Texts of Scripture that speak of Heresy or Hereticks with reference to matters of Faith; and I doubt not but it is from these two Texts, that the common ecclesiastical Notion of Heresy, as it is distinguished from Schism, is taken up. But now from these two Texts we plainly see, that Heresy is not so much a Fault of a Man's Understanding, as of his Will. In the Sense of these two Apostles, he only is an Heretick that denies some fundamental Truths of Christ's Religion, that subverts the Faith, and teaches Doctrines inconsistent with Christianity; and this out of evil Principles, so that his own Conscience cannot but accuse him. But he is not a Heretick, however he may be mistaken in Matters of Religion, who holds to the Foundation of the Christian Faith, and means honestly, and endeavours to inform himself as well as he can. So that it is in every Man's Power to avoid the being a Heretick; and none but a wicked Person can be so. St. *Augustin*, I am sure,

was of this Opinion, when he said, *Errare possum Hæreticus esse nolo*; I may be under Errors or Mistakes, but I will not be an Heretick. Intimating that it was not so much Defect of the Understanding, as Vice and Sin and a corrupt Inclination of Mind, that made a Man to deserve that Name.

The Reflection I make upon what I have now said about Heresy in Matters of Faith, is this: We see from hence how groundlessly, how unreasonably, we Protestants are charged with Heresy by our Adversaries. They make no Scruple of calling us Hereticks, and telling us we shall be damned upon that Account, unless we come over to their Belief. Why, what is it they would have us believe? We believe all that Jesus Christ and his Apostles taught to the World, so far as we have Knowledge of it. We believe all the Holy Scriptures, and not only so, but we make them the Rule of our Faith. We believe all those Articles of Faith into which all Christians in every Country from Christ's Time to this have been baptised, and which by all the Antients have been accounted a perfect Summary of the Christian Faith; nor do we hold any thing inconsistent with them. We own both Christ's Sacraments; and we administer them entirely. We renounce all the Heresies that were condemned by the antient general Councils; nay, we are ready to refer ourselves to those

Councils, and to the primitive Fathers who lived at that Time, for the Trial of all the Points which are disputed between us. And lastly, we are sure we are not obstinate in our Errors, if they should prove so; we are sure we have no secular Ends to serve in the maintaining them; and most of all sure we are, that we are not self-condemned, that our own Conscience doth not accuse us for being of this Way; (which yet is one of those Things that go to the making of an Heretick); Now if all these Things can be truly said of us, (as I think they may be truly said of the Church of *England*, and of all the honest Members of it) how is it possible that we can in any Sense be guilty of Heresy? In the Sense of the Scriptures and of the Fathers I am sure we are Orthodox Christians: And in the Sense of the greatest Divines, even in the *Roman* Communion, I am sure we are no Hereticks. And if after all that, we must be branded with that Name, all that we can say is, that *after the*
Way which they call Heresy, so worship we the God of our Fathers.

Acts 24. 14

But, 2dly, there is another Notion of Heresy in the Holy Scriptures, besides that I have now mentioned; and that is with respect to ecclesiastical Peace and Communion: As a Man who deserts the Faith is guilty of Heresy, so is he who causelessly breaks the Communion of the Church, a Heretick also in the Language of the Scripture.

Now

Now in this Sense Heresy is the same Thing with that which we call Schism; and in this Sense I do verily believe St. Paul meant it in the Text I am now upon. That he did so, will appear to any one who will look two Verses backwards, and observe how the Text comes in. In the 17th Verse of this Chapter St. Paul tells the *Corinthians*, that he had one Thing to declare to them, for which he was far from praising them: and that was, *that they came together not for the better, but for the worse*. Now what that was which rendered their Assemblies so unprofitable, or rather so prejudicial to them, he tells them in the 18th Verse; For, says he, *when ye come together in the Church, I hear that there be Divisions among you*: [The original Words are, *I hear there be* xouam. *Schisms among you*:] and, says he, *I partly believe it*; and then he gives the Reason why he is so inclinable to believe this of them in the Words of my Text, For, says he, *there must be Heresies among you*. So that it is evident that what he called Schisms or Divisions in the former Verse, he calls Heresies in the following Verse, and consequently that he meant the same Thing by both those Words. It is wholly indifferent to my present Business in which of these two Senses the Words of my Text be interpreted. I shall in what I have further to say have respect to both; only before I proceed, I would make a Reflection upon this Notion

of Heresy, as I did upon the former. According to the Sense I have now given of the Text, every one who makes Divisions, every one that causeth Schisms, is guilty of Heresy. This is true, and let those who are concerned in it look to it. It must be acknowledged, that as Christianity now stands in the World, nay as it hath stood for several Ages, there have been, and are a great many Divisions and Schisms in the Church. They who are united in one common Faith, are not united in one common Communion, as the primitive Churches were, That is indeed the Infelicity and Misery of Christendom; and all good Men do sadly lament it. But Woe be to them by whom this Offence cometh!

There are who call us Schismaticks, because we are now in a State of Separation from the Church of *Rome* upon account of our Reformation. But we are sure we do not deserve that Name. If indeed it did appear either that that Church was the only Catholick Church, out of which there is no Salvation; or that we had departed farther from that Church, or any Church, than we are convinced they have departed from the primitive Rule of Christ and his Apostles; or that what was done in our Reformation, was done without lawful and sufficient Authority; or that at this Day we refuse Communion with any, or with all the Churches in the World, upon such
Terms

Terms as either the Laws of Christ will allow us, or the primitive Churches would have submitted to; I say, if any of these Things could be made out against us, there would be some Colour to accuse us of Schism from the Catholick Church for adhering to our Reformation. But since it may be made evident that the quite contrary to all these Things is true; since it may be made evident that the *Roman* Church is but a particular Church, and that we in this Nation have within ourselves as full and as independant Authority to reform Abuses in Doctrine and Worship, as she or any other Church hath; and since it may be made evident that nothing was done in our Reformation but by lawful and good Authority, and that we have in no Instance departed from the Catholick Church, no nor from the *Roman*, save where their Terms of Communion were inconsistent with our Duty to God; and that we are at this Day ready to join in Communion with all the Churches in the World, upon the primitive Catholick Terms: I say, this being our Case, it is as impossible we should be guilty of Schism in adhering to our Reformation, as it is we should be guilty of Heresy, when we own all Catholick Doctrines.

Having thus given an Account of Heresy, both as it signifies a Departure from Faith, and a Departure from Ecclesiastical Communion,

munition, I now come, in the old Place, to give some Account of St. Paul's Proposition, that there *must be Heresies*, take that Word in which of the two Senses you please. St. Paul says, that *there must be Heresies*; that is to say, it cannot be avoided, but that there will be Errors and Mistakes in Matters of Faith; there will be Sects, and Parties, and Factions in Religion; nay, it cannot be avoided, but there will be such Men as will endeavour to bring in dangerous Doctrines into the Church. I know, says Acts 20. v. 29, 30. St. Paul in another Place, *that grievous Wolves shall enter in among you, not sparing the Flock, and of yourselves shall Men arise speaking perverse Things to draw away the Disciples after them.* And this indeed is no more than what our Saviour had told us before; *Wo*, says he, *unto the World because of Offences, for it must needs be that Offences come.* Ἀνάγκη γὰρ ἔστω, there is a Necessity for it; or, as St. Luke expresses it, Ἀνυπόθετον ἔστι μὴ ἐλθεῖν; *It is impossible but Offences will come.* Now certainly among those Offences which our Saviour speaks of, Heresies and Schisms were not the least.

But it will be asked, Why must there be Heresies and Schisms? Whence doth the Necessity of them arise? I answer, It doth arise from the present corrupt Frame of human Nature, and the Constitution of Things in this World. To say that there will always be Heresies and Schisms, is no more than

Serm. 1. *Against Heresy.*

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than to say that there will always be in the World some Men who will be so knavish, as for worldly Ends, to endeavour to seduce others from the Ways of Truth and Peace; and that there will be others so foolish as to be seduced by them. Hence it is that all Heresies and Schisms do arise; and till it please God to keep Sin and Folly out of the World, and by an over-ruling Hand to preserve Men from abusing that natural Liberty he hath given them; I say, till God doth this, it cannot be expected that the Church should be free from these Things. It is not for want of a plain Rule to know our Duty, that any Man becomes either a Heretick or Schismatick, nor is it his own venturing to make a Judgment of that Rule which makes him so. For as the Rule of Religion is infinitely plain in all necessary Points, (and as for unnecessary ones it is not a Farthing matter how much Men differ about them, so long as they do not break Charity and the Churches Peace upon account thereof) I say, as the Rule of Religion is infinitely plain in all necessary Matters; so when all is done every Man must judge for himself as to the Meaning of that Rule. But here is the Thing: It is the want of Honesty and Virtue, it is Vice and Sin, it is Pride or Ambition, or Envy or Discontent; it is the Love of the World, and the Desire of serving some secular Interest; I say, these are the Things that make an Heretick;
these

these are the Things that both gave Birth to all the Heresies and Schisms that are among Christians; and will perpetuate them to the World's End. And this I suppose is abundantly sufficient to make out the Truth of St. Paul's Proposition, that there *must be Heresies*. For so long as God is pleased to permit Sin and Folly in the World, so long he must be supposed to permit Heresies.

But it will be said, Is not God in the mean time very unkind to his Church, by suffering it to be thus exposed to Divisions and false Opinions? How can this consist either with his Promises in the Scripture, or with the Goodness of his Providence? I answer; That as to the Promises which God has made in Scripture concerning his Church, they are all safe, whatever Heresies or Schisms there be in the World. For all that God hath promised about the Church in Scripture, is this, that there shall always be a Company of Men professing his true Religion, with whom he will be present by the Influence of his Holy Spirit even to the End of the World. Now this Promise Christ hath hitherto made good, and we doubt not will do so as long as the World lasts. But he has no where promised that his Church shall be free from Errors or Divisions: On the contrary, both himself and his Apostles have told us that we are to expect such Things. And then as for the other Point, How this can consist with the Goodness

Goodness of God's Providence, the Answer is easy: For the same Reason that God is pleased to permit the Vices and Wickednesses of Mankind, for the same Reason he is pleased to permit Heresies and Schisms in the Church. And the Reason both of the one and the other is very obvious, *viz.* that very great and good Ends are served by them. The common Method of God's Providence is to suffer all his Creatures to act according to the Powers which he hath conferred upon their Natures, and accordingly having endued Mankind with Liberty and Choice, so as that they may do well or do ill, he permits them to exercise those Powers, tho' oftentimes they employ them to ill Purposes. But then here appears the Wisdom and Goodness of his Providence, that he has so contrived Things, that that which is bad in itself, and very bad likewise to them that do it, shall prove very good if we respect the whole Creation. My Meaning is this, God doth not hinder natural Events, but he so orders Matters, that very excellent Ends and Purposes are served by the worst Things that happen in the World. Heresy and Schism are very bad Things, and Woe be to them who have any hand in them: but yet for all that, they bring a great deal of Good to Mankind. And I do not in the least doubt but St. *Paul* had an Eye to this in the Words of my Text. We render them thus, *There must be Heresies;*
but

but in the Original they seem to import somewhat more. The *Latin* Version fully expresses it, *Oportet esse Hæreses; it is fit, it is meet, it is convenient there should be Heresies*, because many excellent Ends are served by them; a great deal accrues from them to the Church of Christ. And this leads me to the third general Head I am to insist on, *viz.*

III. To shew for what Reason God permits Heresies, and what Ends they serve for; and particularly to explain the Reason given by St. Paul, *viz. that they which are approved may be made manifest.*

1. And here I cannot but in the first Place take Notice of this, that the being of Heresies and Divisions amongst Christians, is a great Confirmation to us not only that the Scripture is our true Rule of Faith, but also that we have the true Scriptures. It has often been taken Notice of as a very remarkable Thing, and really it is so, that the *Jews*, who have ceased to be a Commonwealth for above 1600 Years, and have had no Place of abiding, but have been, and are scattered into all the Places of the habitable World; nay farther, at several Times all means imaginable have been used for the rooting them out from the Face of the Earth; do yet, notwithstanding all this, continue not only in being, but continue as distinct from all other People, and as obstinately

nately tenacious of their own Religion, as they were when they lived under their own Government in the Land of *Canaan*. There is no Instance like this to be given in Story. What Use now is to be made of this? Why (as many have observed, and St. *Austin* particularly) this is a standing Proof of the Christian Religion; and that (to omit other Instances) in this respect these People are the bitterest Adversaries that the Christian Religion ever had; but yet these People always have, and still do own, nay and are very zealous for that very Canon of Scripture upon which we Christians do ground our Religion, and from which we fetch the chief Arguments that we bring against them. Nay, and they of all Sorts of People have been the most careful to preserve Copies of these Scriptures entire, and free from any Corruption or Alteration. From whence we Christians have a demonstrative Argument, that the Scriptures of the Old Testament which we urge against the *Jews* are sincere and uncorrupted; that there have been no Tricks played, no Fraud or Forgery used by us to make these Writings speak as they do, since the greatest Enemies we have in the World do bear Testimony to us that we have the true Scriptures, and do themselves make use of the same Copies which we do.

To bring this now to our Purpose: The same Thing that the *Jews* our Adversaries do

do for the Old Testament, do the Hereticks and Schismatics among us for the New. Had not these been in the Church, we could not have been so secure of the Rule of our Faith: neither the Authority, nor the Sufficiency, nor the Genuineness and Uncorruptness of the New Testament, could ever so well have been made to appear. But now since there always have been Heresies and Diversities of Opinions, since there always have been Schisms and Factions in the Church of Christ, and all of these, how disagreeing soever otherwise, have always pleaded the Scripture for themselves, and have appealed to the Writings of the Apostles and Evangelists, as the infallible Rule by which they would have their Doctrines to be tried; and since further their Books differ nothing from ours, but they read and quote the Gospels and Epistles as we do, without any material Difference or Variation, and have always done so, (excepting some few of the antient Hereticks, who were so bold as utterly to reject some entire Books of our present Canon); I say, laying all these Things together, it is a very strong Argument, both that our Scriptures are the only true and certain Rule by which we are to be determined in Matters of Faith, and also that they are purely and sincerely conveyed to us without any considerable Variation from the Original Copies. Which Two Things are of considerable Moment and Importance

Importance to every Christian. And yet these two Things could not have been near so well evidenced and made out, had there been no Heresies or Divisions in the Christian Church. By the Being of these we gain Testimony of our Adversaries both to the Truth and the Integrity of the Rule we proceed by. And the Testimony of an Adversary is in all Disputes accounted the strongest Proof that can be given of a Thing.

2dly, Another excellent End that Heresies serve in the World, and for which God permits them, is this, that they extremely tend to excite Mens Industry, and to put them upon the Search of Truth. They prove an excellent Means to persuade Men that they ought not in Matters of Salvation be prescribed to by others; but that they should examine all Things, and *hold fast to that* which, upon their Examination, they found to be true and good, according to the 1 Thess. 5. 21. Apostle's Rule.

God Almighty did not make us Engines and Machines to be acted and moved at the Pleasure of others; but having given us the Power of Reason and Judgment, he meant we should exercise them not only in Matters of a civil, temporal Concernment, but also in Matters of Religion too. He designed not only that every one of us should satisfy ourselves about our Religion, but that we should take some Pains in gain-
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ing that Satisfaction to ourselves; that we should employ the best of our Skill, and our Wit, and our Parts in inquiring into these Matters; that so we might perform to him a reasonable Service. There is none can deny but that this is a Design both worthy of God, and most suitable to the Nature and Faculties of Men. But now how could this Design have been served, at least half so effectually, if there had not been Differences in Opinion? If there had not been Heresies, and false Doctrines, and Schisms in the World? If all Men from the Beginning of Christianity had been of the same Belief, and Persuasion, and Communion, what Occasion would any Man have had to examine or inquire into the Grounds and Principles of his Religion? What would he have to do further as a Christian, than only to believe and practise as he saw others do before him? that is to say, all Mens Parts and Industry must have been turned quite another Way; and the Business of Religion would not at all have employ'd them. And they would indeed have been at a profound Peace, but at the same time all Study and Search into Truth would have been superseded. A Numbness and Stupidity would have seized all their Faculties, and Ignorance and an implicit Faith would then (as it is now in all Places where they make it their Business by Fire and Inquisition to prevent all Differences in Opinion)

nion) have been the only Parents of Devotion.

Whereas on the contrary, Heresies and Schisms in the Church, tho' they be ill in themselves, and, as I said before, Wo be to those who cause them, or foment them, or have any thing to do with them; yet by the wise Contrivance of God's Providence, whose Method it is to bring Good out of Evil, I say they serve to this good Use, that they whet Mens Industry, and put them upon thinking, and keep them from being secure in, or resting upon any one bare Authority, till they have fully inquired into the Matter. By which means, if they use their Faculties as they should do, they are enabled to serve God as he desires to be served, that is to say, in a Way suitable to the Nature of Mankind, which is with Reason and Understanding.

3. But, *Thirdly*, As the Being of Heresies in the World doth quicken Mens Diligence, and excite them to a more serious Inquiry into the Affairs of Religion, so doth it also tend very much to the Advancement of Truth; and many Points hereby have been fully and satisfactorily cleared, which otherwise might probably still have remained in Obscurity. Of this I give but this one Argument. All those who have in the least dealt in Antiquity, know how loosely and unwarily the first Writers of the Church expressed themselves

as to some Points of Religion. And the Reason is, those Points were not then sufficiently sifted; there had been at that Time no Controversies moved about them. But afterwards when Hereticks arose, and taught in those Matters Things contrary to sound Doctrine, and the Sense of the Church, this gave Occasion to those who were concerned, more narrowly to inquire into those Matters, and upon that Inquiry they gained many Points of Truth, which before possibly were not thought of, or at least not so distinctly apprehended. And from henceforward they expressed themselves less ambiguously, and with more Accuracy, and with greater Evidence. And this is easy to be made appear both in the *Arian* and *Pelagian* Controversies, and in a great many others. And, in truth, take what Points of Religion, what Articles of Faith we will, Experience will shew, that the more obstinately that Point or Article hath been denied, that Denial and Opposition hath occasioned both a clearer Distinction of Truth from Falshood in that Point or Article, and a stronger Confirmation and Proof of that Truth; and hath besides often brought to Light many new Propositions of Truth, some of which possibly were not at all before taken notice of, and some of them not believed, and some of them, tho' believed, yet neither rightly expressed nor sufficiently proved. For the Truth of this, I might
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give remarkable Instances in most of the Points disputed between the Church of *Rome* and us from the Beginning of the Reformation to this Time. But it is not my Design to enter now into these Particulars: but I proceed in the

4th Place, to consider another excellent End for which God permits Heresies in the Church; and that is the particular Reason given by the Apostle in my Text; *viz.* the Trial of Mens Sincerity, Faith and Constancy. *There must, says he, be Heresies, that those which are approved may be made manifest; i. e.* that they who are sincere and honest may by this Trial be known and distinguished from others who are not so. And to the same Purpose doth old *Simeon* affirm, that our Saviour was set up Luke 2. 34, 35. for the Fall and Rising again of many in *Israel*, and for a Sign that should be spoken against, that the Thoughts of many Hearts might be revealed; *i. e.* our Saviour's Person and Doctrine should meet with much Opposition and Contradiction, that hereby the inward Dispositions of Mens Hearts, and their Pretences to Religion might be discovered, whether they were honest and sincere or no. And thus also *St. John* in his first Epistle, speaking of the Antichrists Ch. 2. 18. or Hereticks of those Days, *They went out, says he, from us, that it might be made manifest that they were not of us.* Here therefore is one great Use that God in his

Providence makes of the Quarrels, and Contentions, and Heresies, and Schisms that happen among Christians. They serve the same Ends to Believers within the Church, that Persecution doth from without. God permits them for the Exercise and Improvement of the Virtue of the Good, and for the Discovery of the ill Designs and hypocritical Professions of the Bad. If all Men had been of one Faith and of one Communion, where would have been the Trial of the Faith and Patience of the Saints? What Occasion would they have had to exercise their Courage and Constancy in standing up for the Truth? How should either others or they themselves have known whether they were sincere, or whether they did not take up their Religion for the serving some private Interest or secular Design? Farther, What would have become of that Peace of Conscience and those comfortable Reflections that good Men after they have once been tried may make upon their own Sincerity, and which causeth a continual Joy of Heart to them? And where had been those additional Glories and Rewards in the other World, with which God crowns all those who have endured Temptation, and yet are found faithful to the last? Lastly, to say no more, How should either the Knavery, the Ambition, the Self-seeking, or the Treachery, Inconstancy, and Cowardice of many Pretenders to Religion have been
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been detected? These Ends every body sees are for the Good of the Church, and the Good of all honest Men; but yet they could not have been attained had there been no Divisions or false Religions in the World.

IV. And thus much of my third general Head. I come now to the fourth and last, which is, to make some Application of what has been said, and so conclude.

And first of all; Since it appears that there always will, and unavoidably must be Heresies, Differences in Opinion concerning Religion, false Doctrines, and Divisions, and the like; from hence we gather, how absurd and unreasonable those Men are, who think it a sufficient Reason why they should deny or reject a Religion or Doctrine, because all Men are not agreed about it, or because they who in general own and profess that Religion or Doctrine, are yet at Difference among themselves about several Points relating to it.

This Inference I chiefly direct against the Atheistical Infidel sort of Men among us, who think they do sufficiently baffle all Religion when they tell us, that Mankind are not yet agreed about the true one. The *Turks*, say they, have one Religion, the *Jews* another, the *Pagans* another, the *Christians* another, and all these several sorts of Men are peremptory and confident that they

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only have the true Religion, and that all the rest are mistaken, and are in a dangerous Condition for being so. What therefore, say they, have we to do in this Case? With whom shall we join? All these Men pretend to have the true Religion among them, which of them shall we believe? Is it not much to be presumed that they are all equally in a Mistake, and that Religion (how much Noise soever it makes) is nothing but a Pretence? And till Men be agreed what Religion is, or where it is to be found, it is the wisest to be of no Religion at all, or rather, to be seemingly of any, that best serves our Turns and Interests. This is the Conclusion that they draw from these Premises: but how monstrously absurd and illogical is it! It is just as if they should thus argue; Because there are a great many counterfeit Stones go about in the World, therefore there are no true Jewels, and a Man whose Profession lies that way, is not concerned to make use of his Skill, and Reason, and Judgment for the distinguishing between the one and the other. It is just as if a sick Man should resolve, that till all Physicians were agreed about the Nature of his Distemper, and gave the same Account of it, and prescribed the same Medicines in order to his Cure, he would take no Physick at all. It is just as wise a Conclusion as a Man should make, that because the Philosophers
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in *Tully's* Time were divided into above an hundred Opinions about that which made a happy Life in this World, should therefore determine that there was no such Thing as Happiness, and therefore he would not trouble his Head about it. But if nothing must be believed, if no Design must be pursued, till all Men be agreed about it, what Proposition is there that we can have any Certainty of, or what Project, what Business can we safely or reasonably propose to ourselves to carry on? Is there any Truth in the World, tho' never so plain, but hath met with Opposition and Contradiction? Have there not been Men in the World who have called in question the strictest Mathematical Demonstrations? Are there not yet those in the World who will not allow us in some Cases to believe our own Senses? If therefore a Man must suspend his Belief of any Point, or suspend his Action in any Matter of Business, till all Men have given their Opinion in the Point the same Way, he must never believe any thing nor do any thing all his Life long. God hath furnished us with Reason and Understanding wherewith to examine Things, and he hath contrived the World so as to let us see, that, in most Cases, we must of Necessity act upon probable Grounds and Motives. It is our Parts therefore to use our Reason as well as we can, and to act with as much Prudence as

we can; and if we do this, be it in the Choice of our Religion, or in any other Matter, how different soever other Mens Opinions be, yet we have done well, and God will bless the Issue. And if we had not done thus, but deferred our Resolutions till all Men concurred with us, we had plainly been either Fools or Madmen.

But, *secondly*, From the Grounds I have laid down, it appears, that the *Romanists* are every whit as extravagant as the Infidels and Atheists, when they object to us the Differences of Opinion, and the many Divisions that are among us Protestants; and would from hence draw an Argument to those Persons they tamper with, that our Church or our Religion cannot be true. But why may we not be in the true Church, or have the true Religion for all that? Must there be always Divisions in the Church of Christ (as *St. Paul* saith there must) and must the Protestants be therefore out of the Church, because they have Divisions among them? The Papists themselves, how much soever they boast of their Unity, are not without their Divisions, nay, and great ones, and as to several important Points. Nay, farther, I dare affirm, that as to the Church of *England*, there is at this Day as much Unity among her Members, as to all Points both of Doctrine and Worship, as there is among the Members of any Church in the World.

World. So that if this be an Argument, it concludes nothing against us. But besides, let the Differences of the Protestants be as wide as you please, yet I am sure they do all agree in more than is simply necessary to be believed in order to Salvation. Nay, I am sure, as great as their Differences are, they are not greater than those were which happened among the Christians in the Apostles Days; and yet for all that, those Christians were not unchurch'd upon Account of those Differences. The Apostles still owned them as Members of the Church of Christ: Nay, and this too, (which really ought to be consider'd) tho' they were more inexcusable for their Differences and Divisions than we now are; because they had an infallible Authority to resort to, (*viz.* that of the Apostles) for the deciding all their Controversies, which we have not. We see then how frivolous and unconcluding their Way of arguing is. But that which I have now intimated puts me in mind of another Thing which it will not be unprofitable upon this Occasion to observe; and that is, This very Consideration, that there were Schisms, and Divisions, and Errors among the Christians even in the Apostles Times, would make any reasonable Man believe, that were that true which the *Romanists* pretend, *viz.* that there was, and is, and shall be always an Infallibility lodged in the Christian Church; yet

yet even that would not be sufficient to keep Disputes, and Controversies, and Heresies, and Schisms out of the World: For still Men would be Men; they would have particular Humours and Passions to be gratified; they would have sensual Ends and Interests to carry on; and then all this Infallibility would signify nothing for the ending of Controversies, or preventing Schisms or Heresies among Christians. For, as I said, surely the Apostles were guided by an infallible Spirit; and all Christians in those Times knew them to be so; but were not for all this able to put an End to all the Controversies, and Heresies, and Divisions that broke out in the Church in their Days: No, we have sufficient Evidence to the contrary: And this very Text we are upon, were there no other Argument, would make good what I say.

The second Application which I would make of this Point is to ourselves, who believe and profess the reformed Religion. It is, you see, the Pleasure of God to permit Heresies and Schisms in the Church for the Trial of Mens Honesty and Sincerity. And it must be owned, that we of this Nation have been sufficiently exercised with Trials of this kind; especially from a Church which, tho' it calls itself Catholick, is founded in Principles the most destructive of Catholick Unity of any Communion in Christendom. But, blessed be
God,

God, we have so stood these Trials, that we have no Reason to be ashamed, nor have they any great Reason to boast of their Victory. We are now, by the good Providence of God, in such a Posture, that we hope we shall not need to have much Apprehension of that sort of Trial for the future. But still there is another sort of Trial of this Nature that we remain exposed to; *viz.* the Differences and Dissensions among ourselves; and oh would to God some Balm could be found for the healing of these Wounds! Is it not a pity that we who are all of one Religion, and do equally profess an Aversion to the Tyranny, and Corruptions, and Superstitions of the Church of *Rome*, should yet be at such a Distance from one another that we cannot worship God together? It is true (as I have said) that this is no just Exception against our Reformation, but yet it must needs be owned that it is a greatblemish to it. It is true that there will always be Heresies and Schisms in the Church, and there would be, tho' all Protestants were united: But yet for all that, it is a great Reproach to us that they are not better united. I grant that as to Unity of Opinion in all Points of Religion, the Thing is impracticable; for when all is done, Men, according to the Variety of their Parts, and Tempers, and Educations, must of Necessity think several Ways, and

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consequently they will always differ in their Notions of Things ; and there can no more one fix'd Measure or Standard be set for Mens Apprehensions and Judgments, than there can be for their Statures and Complexions.

But it may be thought, notwithstanding our little Differences in Opinion, it is hard we cannot all agree in the common Terms of worshipping God, and partaking of his Sacraments, especially since we do all acknowledge that we do agree in more Things than are precisely needful for the carrying us to Heaven. Certain it is, nothing is more recommended, nothing is more pressed in the New Testament than this Unity and Communion among Christians. Nay, this very Apostle who hath told us that there must be always Heresies and Divisions in the Church, yet is so far from countenancing them, that he of all the other sacred Writers is the most earnest and passionate in his Exhortations to Unity, and the most severe against those who cause Dissentions, and break the Peace of the Church. Oh ! that God would be pleased to affect all those who profess his Religion in the Truth and Purity of it, with a deep and lively Sense of these Things ; that they would heartily apply themselves to *follow after the Things which make for Peace*, (as our Apostle speaks) that they would *be like-minded, be of one accord*,

accord, of one Soul, so that the God of Peace might be with them! Inestimable indeed are the Benefits that would accrue hereby, both to the Church and State, and to every one of us in particular. By this Means we might the more assuredly expect the Blessing of God upon the whole Community; because hereby we should give the best Evidence that we are the true *Disciples of his Son*, in that *we love one another, and have Peace one with another.* By this Means we should remove the Scandals that our Divisions give to the Enemies of our Religion; and should disappoint them of the most considerable Advantages they have against us for the making Profelytes to their Party. And lastly, by this Means it is to be hoped that our fierce Disputes and Contentions about smaller Things being laid aside, our Zeal and Fervour would be employed in Things far more momentous; in Things wherein the Honour of God and the Salvation of our own Souls is truly concerned; that is to say, in seriously studying to live well, to be pious, and just, and sober in our Conversation; in adorning the Doctrine which we profess by all the heavenly Qualities and good Fruit that so excellent a Religion as ours doth naturally tend to produce in all the Believers of it.



SERMON II.

Some remarkable and important Observations upon the History of Cornelius his Conversion to the Faith.

Preach'd before Q. Mary, Aug. 30, 1691.

ACTS x. 4.

Thy Prayers and thine Alms are come up for a Memorial before God.



O put this Text and what I have to say upon it, into a due Light, it will be necessary I should give some Account of the History that is related in this Chapter. It is the History of *Cornelius* his Conversion to the Christian Faith; and a very remarkable one it is.

This *Cornelius* was Captain in the Garison which the *Romans* kept at *Cæsarea* for the better bridling and securing the *Jews* whom they had conquered. As for his Birth, he was not an *Israelite*, but a *Roman*. As for his Religion, he was not a *Jew*, but a Gen-
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tile or Heathen. But yet such an Heathen, as had renounced the Pagan Idolatry, and owned the one supreme God, and worshipped that God in the Way that natural Religion taught, tho' not in the Way of the *Jews*. Such Men as these were by the *Jews* stiled Profelytes of the Gate, and many such there were among them.

The Character which is here given of him is, that he was *a devout Man, and feared* Ver. 1. *God with all his House, and gave much Alms to the People, and prayed to God continually.* Here was a worthy Heathen Soldier indeed, and fit to be a Pattern not only to all those of his Profession amongst Christians, but also to all Christians of what Profession soever. He did not only fear God himself, but he took care to possess all his Family with the same Sense of Religion; and tho' he did not know the particular Way in which God had declared he would be served, yet he did all that he could to recommend himself to his Favour; and natural Reason taught him, (as well as the Law of the *Jews*, among whom he might converse) that if any thing in the World could procure the Divine Acceptance, it must be fervent Devotion towards God, and hearty Charity towards Men; and therefore he laid himself out in these Duties to the utmost of his Power. And he was not mistaken in his Belief; for such a Man as this God would not suffer to perish, but rather than he should want

Means of Information about the right Way to everlasting Happiness, God would supply the Defects by a Miracle. And accordingly the next News we hear is, that when

Ver. 3. he was at his Prayers *about the ninth Hour of the Day* (*viz.* our three o'Clock in the Afternoon, when they offered the Evening Sacrifice in the Temple) *an Angel from Heaven* appeared to him, and calling him by his Name, said in the Words of my Text,

Ver. 4. *Thy Prayers and thine Alms are come up for*

Ver. 5. *a Memorial before God. Now therefore send*

Ver. 6. *Men to Joppa, and inquire for one Simon, whose Surname is Peter, he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.* Upon this *Cornelius* dispatches away three Messengers to *Joppa*, which was about 30 Miles distant from *Cæsarea*, where he dwelt. On the next Day

from v. 6. to v. 34. they find *St. Peter* at his Lodging. They acquaint him with their Message, and the Occasion of it. He being admonished by the Spirit of God to go with them, prepares for the Journey, notwithstanding the Doubts he had whether he, being a *Jew*, could lawfully converse with the Gentiles, whom he looked upon as unclean; for God Almighty had removed that Scruple by a Vision which he had sent him on that very Day. Accordingly on the 3d Day he comes to *Cornelius* his House at *Cæsarea*. There he finds him and all his Friends assembled together, waiting for the Instruction that *Peter* would give them: And having had an Account from

from *Cornelius* himself of what had happened to him, and of the Reason why he was sent for, he then began to discourse to them about our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Necessity of believing on him in order to Salvation. The Particulars of which Sermon you have from the 34th Verse to the 44th. And the Effect that it had upon them was this, that as St. *Peter* was thus discoursing to them, *the Holy Ghost fell upon all the Company*, just as he had done on the Twelve Apostles on the Day of Pentecost; and they all became Converts to the Christian Religion, and were all baptized into it. Ver. 44.

This is the Sum of *Cornelius* his Story, as it is related in this Chapter; by which you may see how my Text comes in, and what we are naturally led to observe from it. But there are such other useful Things observable from this History, both with relation to our Instruction, and to the Conduct of our Lives, that I think I ought not so to confine myself to the Text, as to pass them over.

I shall therefore lay some of these Observations before you, and shall in the last Place consider what is observable from the Words of the Text.

I. The first Observation I make from this History is, that we have therein an illustrious Instance of that important Truth which it concerns all of us to remember, and often

to think of, if we in good earnest design to lead such Lives as we ought to do; and that is this, that God is not wanting to any Man's sincere Endeavours, but is willing and ready to assist every one with his Grace, and to add further Means and Helps as there is need of them. Whoever will faithfully do that which he can do towards the serving God, tho' that which he can do be but little, such a Man shall be carried further; and God will take care that at last he shall be put into such a Condition, that he may walk acceptably before him. *Cornelius* was a Stranger to the true Religion; but so far as he knew his Duty, he was honest and sincere in doing it. He knew by the Light of Nature that to pray to God, and to give Alms, were probable Means of gaining his Favour; and therefore he accordingly took these Methods. This now God accepted; and because of his Sincerity in doing what he could, he vouchsafed his special Grace and Assistance, whereby he was enabled to know, and to do those Things which by Nature he could not.

I wish this Example of his was more considered and followed; we should not then have so many among us, that would live so contentedly under the Slavery of their Sins and Vices, upon a Pretence that they have not Grace and Strength enough to overcome them. The great Plea that Men do generally make for the Wickedness

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or Carelessness of their Lives is this, that really it is not in their Power to live up to such a Rate of Holiness and Virtue, as the Law of God obligeth them to: Grace is in them too weak, and their natural Corruptions too strong, for their ever being in a Capacity, without more Assistance from God, to live strict and religious Lives: Conversion is the Work of God, and cannot be wrought by a Man's self; and therefore till God shall please to come upon them with an irresistible Power of his Holy Spirit, they must be contented to live as they do; nay, they must unavoidably live so.

We do readily grant, that without God's Grace no Man can do any thing; and we grant likewise, that it is very probable their Circumstances may be such, that it is not morally possible, unless they had greater Strength and more Grace than they have, on a sudden to live as they ought to do; for their bad Principles are really more powerful than their good ones: But yet in the mean time we must needs tell them, that they are not mere Stocks and Stones. How much Reason soever they have to complain of the Infirmitie or Degeneracy of their Natures, yet some Things they can do towards the bettering of them: For Instance, tho' they cannot on a sudden conquer the inward Bent and Inclination of their Minds, so as to hate all Sin, and to delight in Virtue, yet they must needs confess that they have a

Power over their outward Actions: They can as well (if they think it reasonable) direct their Feet towards a Church, as to a House of Gaming, or Drinking, or Lewdness: Their Eyes will serve them as well to look upon a Bible, or a serious Discourse about Religion, as to read a scurrilous and prophane Book: It is as much in their Power, if they please, to yield their Ears to the reasonable Advice of their sober Friends, as to the mad Harangues of the dissolute Company they keep. These Things they must needs acknowledge they can do, if they will: nay, and they can do more than this; for if they please they may give themselves Time to consider and think of what they read, or what is said to them, or what their own Experience or Observation of Things will suggest to their Minds; and they can further, if they please, add to their Consideration their Prayers to Almighty God to direct them, to assist them, to strengthen them.

Now tho' we grant that all this without God's especial Grace will not be effectual for their Regeneration and Conversion, yet, we say, that if they will but do as much as this comes to, we can assure them, that in Time they shall have this especial Grace that they now want. In the same Proportion that they use and employ those Gifts and Powers which they at present have, God will encrease and enlarge them; so that

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what now seems impossible to them, shall in a little Time appear possible; and what is then but possible, shall in a little Time more look very probable to be done; and what in these Circumstances is but a bare Probability, shall in Time be reduced to Act; that is, they shall at last really live as they should do, and be in actual Possession of that Holiness and Virtue, and that Acceptance with God, which (as their present Condition stands) they now despair of. And the Truth of all this is confirmed to us by that memorable Aphorism of our Saviour, which we find in his Mouth at several Times, and upon several Occasions: *To him that hath, ^{Matt. 25.} to him shall be given, and he shall have in ^{29.} abundance; but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he hath.* The plain Sense of which is no other than this, that every one who well husbands and employs those Talents that his Lord hath committed to him to trade with, (as to every Person some Talents are committed, to some Persons more, and to others fewer) every one who takes care to employ the Gifts and Powers he hath received from God to a good End, (be they at first never so mean and contemptible) such a Man shall have his Stock increased: Tho' he had but a very little at first, yet in proportion to his good Management, the Bounty of his Lord shall be enlarged to him, till at last he shall have in abundance: But, on the contrary, every

one who hides his Talent in a Napkin, that lets the Powers that God hath given him lie idle and unemployed, that doth not use due Care and Industry for the improving of them, *even that which he hath shall be taken from him.* God will withdraw all that Strength and Grace, and all those Means and Assistances, that he did at first afford to him.

2. A second Thing I take notice of in this History of *Cornelius* is, that when God had declared by the Angel that he should have the Gospel of Salvation preached to him, there is a particular Order given, that he should send for *Peter* to undertake that

Ver. 5. 6. Office. *Send,* says he, *to Joppa, and call for one Simon, surnamed Peter, he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.* Why must *St. Peter*, above all other of the Apostles, be sent for to perform this Work, and especially when he was at so great a Distance from the Place? That which I observe from hence is this, that this Circumstance gives us a clear Account of the true Meaning of that Promise which our Saviour made to *St. Peter*, upon his having made a publick Declaration, that Jesus was the Christ the Son of God: *I say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this Rock will I build my Church, and the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against it: And I will give unto thee the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven.* The

Matt. 16.
18.

Ver. 19.

Papists

Serm. 2. *Conversion of Cornelius.*

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Papists make a world ado with this Passage, and because the Keys of the Kingdom of Heaven are here so particularly made over to St. *Peter*, they from hence conclude, that he was made Head of the Church, and invested with a Superiority and Jurisdiction over the rest of the Apostles, and consequently that his Successors, the Popes of *Rome*, have the supreme Government of the Christian World. But if we will well consider this History of *Cornelius*, and join to it what is reported to us in the 2d Chapter of the *Acts*, where the Story is told us of St. *Peter's* preaching to the *Jews* on the Day of Pentecost, we shall be fully satisfied, that it was quite another Privilege than the Headship of the Catholick Church that was promised to St. *Peter* in those Words of our Saviour.

The Kingdom of Heaven (of which our Lord then promised him the Keys) is undoubtedly to be understood of the Kingdom of Christ in the World, viz. *that Church* which Christ there said *he would build, and against which the Gates of Hell should not prevail.* By the *Keys* of this Kingdom, must undoubtedly be understood the Power of admitting Persons into this Church, and shutting them out of it; for to what other Use doth a Key serve, but to open and shut a Lock? Now these Keys, tho' they were afterwards given to all the Apostles, and to their Successors, yet they are here promised
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to *St. Peter* in particular, and by Name; and that, as we grant, for a Reward of his so clear and noble a Confession of Christ Jesus: And we make no doubt neither but that in this Promise there was a particular Privilege conferred upon him, that was not upon the rest of the Apostles. All this we grant. But now what was this Privilege? Was it that he should be the Prince of the Apostles, and his Successors Lords of the World? No such matter. But only this, that *St. Peter*, for his generous Acknowledgment of our Lord, should have the Honour, by his preaching, to open the Kingdom of Heaven both to the *Jews* and to the *Gentiles*; and accordingly we find that God made good this Promise to him in both these Instances: For to the *Jews* he opened the Kingdom of Heaven upon the Day of Pentecost, that very Day on which the Holy Ghost descended upon the Apostles in a visible Manner. Then did *Peter*, being filled with the Spirit, preach so effectually to the *Jews* there assembled, that 3000 of them were by that Sermon brought into the Church. And now here again, when God thinks fit that the Doors of the Kingdom of Heaven should be opened to the *Gentiles*, who is to be employed upon that Work, but the same *St. Peter* to whom our Lord had given the Keys? It is expressly ordered by the Angel, that he, and no other, should be sent for to preach the Gospel to *Cornelius*,
and

and that by his Means the *Gentiles* should be made Believers, and admitted into the Church of Christ. And thus did St. *Peter* exercise his Power of the Keys in opening the Kingdom of Heaven, both to the *Jews* and to the *Gentiles*. And thus did Christ, in a remarkable Manner, make good that which he had so particularly promised him. But what is this to St. *Peter's* being Head of the Apostles, or the Pope of *Rome* being the Head of the Catholick Church?

3. A Third Observation I make from this History of *Cornelius* is this, that it is not enough to entitle any Man to everlasting Salvation, that he practiseth the Duties of Natural Religion, unless he also believe and embrace that Religion which God has revealed by Jesus Christ, supposing he has Opportunities of coming to the Knowledge of it. *Cornelius*, of whom we are treating, was certainly, as far as Natural Religion could carry a Man, as devout and honest a Person, and as acceptable to God upon that Account, as any we can imagine: And God did so far accept him, as to send an Angel in pure Kindness to him. But then this Angel's Message to him, was not that God did very well approve of the Way that he was in, and that he needed not trouble himself farther; but this, that he had done well for a Man in his Circumstances, but if he would farther recommend himself to
God,

God, and save his Soul, he must send for one *Peter* from *Joppa* to instruct him in the Christian Religion. But if now, upon his sending for *Peter*, and hearing what he had to say concerning Christ, he had still continued an Unbeliever, or a Heathen, would God then have continued to accept him? No, by no means; he had shewed himself unworthy of God's Favour, nor could he in the least expect the Reward of an honest and religious Man.

The Inference I make from hence is this, That bare Morality or Honesty of Life, without a right Faith, will not save a Man's Soul, supposing that the Man hath Opportunities of coming to the Knowledge of that right Faith, as *Cornelius* here had. And this Consideration I seriously address to all those among us, who think it so indifferent a matter what Religion or what Faith they are of, provided they are but honest in their Lives. They think that nothing offends God but the open Violation of those Rules of Morality which all the World must acknowledge themselves obliged to observe, and which it is scandalous not to observe. So that it is all one to a Man's Salvation, whether he be *Turk*, or *Jew*, or Heathen, or Christian, supposing he be but devout in his Way, and have a regard in his Dealings with others to the Practice of that which is accounted fair, just, and honourable amongst Men. But this is a grievous Mistake, and

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of most pernicious Consequence. It is certain, that where-ever God has revealed his Will, and declared upon what Terms he will bestow Salvation upon Mankind, there all Men are, under Pain of Damnation, obliged to embrace his Revelation, and to believe, and profess, and practise according to the Doctrines of such Revelation. And it is certain likewise, that God hath fully and entirely revealed his Will by Jesus Christ and his Apostles in the New Testament; and so revealed it, as to exclude all Men from the Hopes of Salvation, who, having Opportunity of knowing Jesus Christ and his Doctrines, do not believe in him. And therefore for any Man to reject this Method of God, and to say, I hope to be saved by another Way than God hath appointed, is the extreamest Folly in the World: Let every one therefore among us, as they would not be undone to all Eternity, endeavour to instruct themselves aright in the true Religion. All their pretended moral Honesty will not in the least excuse them before God, if, when having Means to find the Truth, they do not embrace it, but continue Infidels or Misbelievers. If they had been born and bred in an Heathen Country, where they had no Opportunity of coming to the Knowledge of God's revealed Will, I know not how far their Justice and Temperance, and other good moral Qualities, might avail them towards
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the procuring God's Acceptance. But to live in a Christian Country, nay, and to be baptised into Christ's Religion, and yet to be Pagans as to their Notions and Opinions; not to believe in Jesus Christ, but to think to please God in the Way of the Philosophers; there is nothing in the World to be said in their Excuse for this. And they will at last find true what our Saviour hath pronounced, that *this is their Condemnation* (and a heavy one it will be) *that Light is come into the World, but they have loved Darkneſs rather than Light.*

John 3.19.

IV. The fourth Observation I make upon this History is, That God, even in the extraordinary Expressions of his Kindness to Sinners, in such Cases where he is pleased to work a Man's Conversion in a miraculous Way, yet hath such a Regard to the standing ordinary Means of Grace, as even in these Cases to make use of them for bringing his Work about. Rather than *Cornelius* should continue an Infidel or Stranger to the true Religion, God was here pleased to send an Angel from Heaven to direct him to the right Faith and Belief: This was wholly extraordinary and miraculous. Now it is worthy of our Observation, that this Angel doth not take upon him to instruct *Cornelius* in the Christian Religion, and to teach him what he was to believe concerning Jesus Christ, and what he was to practise
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if he would have eternal Life; (tho' certainly he could very well and very easily have done it) no; but for this he refers him to St. Peter, one of the standing publick Ministers of the Gospel. *Send*, says he, Ver. 6. *for one Simon surnamed Peter; he shall instruct thee what thou shalt do.* And thus it was also in the Case of St. Paul, who was another remarkable Instance of a miraculous and extraordinary Conversion, and in many Respects a greater Instance than that we have now before us. For to him God did not send an Angel, as he did to *Cornelius*, but our Lord Jesus Christ himself vouchsafed to appear to him, and that in the most glorious and astonishing Manner that could be imagined. But what then? Did our Lord instruct him in the Religion he was to believe? Did he make him a Christian? No, not at all. All that he did was to make him sensible of his Error in opposing and persecuting the Christian Faith; but for Instruction and Information in that Faith he referr'd him to a publick Minister of the Gospel. The Scriptures tell us, that when St. Paul, trembling and astonished, said, *Lord, what wouldest thou have me to do?* Acts 9. 6. the Answer that our Saviour gave him was not, I will thee; but this, *Arise and go into the City, and it shall be told thee what thou shalt do.* And accordingly he was no sooner come into the City, but *Ananias* a Christian Minister was ordered to go and wait upon him,

him, and to instruct him in the Faith, and to make a Christian of him by Baptism. These are illustrious Expressions of the great Value that God sets upon the ordinary publick Means which he hath appointed in the Church, for the bringing Men to Holiness and Happiness. And they are strong Proofs of the Obligation that is upon every Person to make use of those Means, let their Circumstances be what they will. And therefore let every Man as he loves his Soul have a care of refusing them, have a care of withdrawing from them, and most of all have a care of despising them, upon a Pretence that he is above Ordinances, and that he is too perfect a Christian to have need of such carnal Administrations. He who thinks to be a good Christian, and to live acceptably to God merely by the Strength and Virtue of his own private Devotions, or Reading, or Meditation, or upon the account of any secret Inspiration, or Impulses, or Revelations, while in the mean time he makes no Reckoning of God's standing Ordinances, refuses his Communion with the Church, and lives without publick Prayers and Sacraments, as thinking them empty Formalities, such a Man is horribly cheated and abused, and will find at last that he extremely wrongs his own Soul; because he doth really put himself out of the common Way of God's Blessing. He will not be content to receive the divine Influences thro' such

such Conduits and Channels as God hath ordered they should be conveyed thro'; but he will have a Way of his own, which God hath no where promised that he will bless; but, on the contrary, has given us great Reason to believe that he will not bless.

V. The fifth and last Observation that I make from this History is, that which the Text itself suggesteth to us; *viz.* the wonderful Efficacy of Prayers and Alms to recommend us to the Favour of God. *Cornelius*, as I have before said, was, without doubt, as to all the Instances of his Conversation, an honest and a good Man, as far as he knew. But that which God principally takes notice of in him, and rewards him for, was his constant praying, and his great Bounty and Charity. Certain it is, the Angel who was sent to him mentions no other of his Virtues but these two. *Cornelius*, says he, *thy Prayers and thine Alms are come up for a Memorial before God.* Come up for a Memorial before God,— what is that? Why it is a Phrase just of the same Importance as if he had said, Thy Prayers and thine Alms are an Offering of a sweet-smelling Savour unto God. Both the Phrases are frequently used in the Scripture, and they both mean the same Thing. And indeed *St. Peter* in the very Beginning of his Sermon seems to take notice of these two Vir-

tues in *Cornelius*, (*viz.* Devotion and Charity) as well as the Angel, nay, and from hence draws a general Conclusion; *I perceive*, says he, *that God is no Respector of Persons; but in every Nation he that feareth God and worketh Righteousness is accepted of him*: That is to say, in every Nation he that is heartily devout towards God, and charitable towards Men, (for to work Righteousness is generally the Scripture Phrase to express the exercising of Mercy and Charity) every such Person is accepted of God. Oh that we would all seriously think of this, and practise it; if we did, we should certainly take the best Course in the World to draw down the Blessings of God upon us, both those of this World, and of the other. Frequent, and constant, and devout Prayer hath so many Promises made to it, both in the Old Testament and in the New, that no Man who reads and believes the Scriptures can possibly doubt, but that he who useth it shall certainly be heard in what he prays for; or if God do not grant his Prayers in the particular Instances that the Man desires, yet he will so far grant them as to give him such Things as are much better for him. And as for Alms and Charity, they are always described in Scripture as the most acceptable Sacrifice we can offer to God, and the most effectual Means we can make use of for the averting the Punishment of our Sins, and the procuring to us

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the Mercies and Blessings that we stand in need of. *To do good and to communicate,* Heb. 13. says St. Paal, *forget not, for with such Sa-* 16. *crifices God is well pleased:* And *above all* 1 Pet. 4. 8. *things,* says St. Peter, *put on Charity, for Charity shall cover a multitude of Sins.* And the same Advice doth the Prophet Daniel give to *Nebuchadnezzar* for the covering the multitude of his Sins; *Let my Counsel,* says Dan. 4. 27. *he, O King, be acceptable to thee, Break off thy Sins by Righteousness,* (that is, by giving Alms, as I said before) *and thine Iniquities by shewing Mercy to the Poor; if it may be a lengthening of thy Tranquillity.* In short, such is the Efficacy of constant Prayer and Charity, such a Regard hath God to these two Things, that whosoever doth seriously and conscientiously practise them, he will be accepted of God. If he be now a bad Man, it will be impossible for him to continue so long; for God will so assist him, so strengthen him, so enlighten him, that he shall at last become a Convert to true Virtue and Religion. And if he be a good Man already, he takes the most effectual Course in the World every Day to grow better and better, so that he will go from *Strength to Strength,* till at last he will appear before God in the Heavenly Sion.



SERMON III.

The Prodigal Son. The true and miserable State of Sinners. Consideration usually the first Step to Repentance.

Preached before Queen MARY, 1692.

LUKE XV. 17, 18.

And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired Servants of my Father have Bread enough and to spare, and I perish with Hunger! I will arise and go to my Father.



THESE Words are a Part of our Saviour's famous Parable of the prodigal Son, in which many excellent Things are delivered for the Instruction, and Direction, and Encouragement of all penitent Sinners.

Two Things may be observed in these Words. *First*, The miserable Condition which the Prodigal had brought himself into

into by his evil Courses. *How many hired Servants, says he, of my Father have Bread enough and to spare, and I perish with Hunger!*

Secondly, His Resolution to return to his Father, which followed upon the Sense and Consideration of this. When he came to himself, and consider'd this, he said, I will arise and go to my Father, &c.

Under the first of these Heads I shall make it my Business to lay before you the true State of Sinners and wicked Men, who are the Persons signified by the Prodigal; and that both as to the Steps by which they proceed in Sin, and as to the wretched Circumstances they bring themselves into thereby.

Under the second Head I shall treat of the Method by which Sinners are brought to Repentance: The first Step of which is *a coming to themselves*, as it is here expressed; that is, entering into a deep and serious Consideration of their own State and Concernments.

I. I begin with the Prodigal's evil Courses and Misery.

Now that you may the better go along with me in this, it is fit I read to you the Beginning of the Parable, wherein a more particular Account is given of the Prodigal,

Ver. 11,
12, 13, 14,
15, 16.

both as to his Sin and his Misery. A certain Man, says our Lord, had two Sons. And the younger of them said to his Father, Father, give me the Portion of Goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his Living. And not many Days after, the younger Son gathered all together, and took his Journey into a far Country, and there wasted his Substance with riotous Living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty Famine in that Land; and he began to be in Want. And he went and joined himself to a Citizen of that Country, and he sent him into his Fields to feed Swine. And he would fain have filled his Belly with the Husks that the Swine did eat, and no Man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, &c.

By the Father here, who had two Sons, to whom he gave Portions out of his Estate, we are to understand God Almighty the great Father and Lord of the World, who, out of his Abundance, doth bestow upon Mankind, who are his Offspring, their several Portions. There is not one of his Children but has a plentiful Provision made for him, and Variety of Talents committed to him; which if he do but carefully manage and improve to the Uses they were given for, he will for ever preserve to himself the Love, and Favour, and Kindness of his heavenly Father, and shall not fail both of living happily and comfortably
here,

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here, and arriving also to a glorious State of Immortality hereafter.

By the two Sons here mentioned, between whom the Father did divide the Inheritance, we are to understand the two different Sorts of Men in the World. In the Character of the eldest Son are represented those Men, who being blessed with a good Temper and virtuous Inclinations, and lighting under a careful Education, have in a great measure preserved their Innocency all their Lives; have never wander'd away from their Father's House; never gone astray in the Paths of Vice and Wickedness; but, as the elder Son saith of himself, have *for many Years served* their heavenly Father without any wilful or habitual *Transgression of his Commandment.* Ver. 29.

In the Character of the younger Son, who is the Prodigal, are represented all those Men who abuse the Talents he hath committed to them, the Benefits, and Helps, and Powers which he has bestowed upon them, to evil and mischievous Purposes; who forsake the Guidance and Conduct of their heavenly Father, and betake themselves to a Course of Vice and Sensuality: In a word, all sorts of Men that have ever lived loosely and wickedly, whether they be *Jews* or *Gentiles*. These are the Prodigals here mentioned; and it was for their Encouragement to repent, and for
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their Comfort if they do so, that this Parable was framed by our Saviour.

Now in this Account which is here given us of the Prodigal's evil Courses, and the Consequences of them, we have a lively Description of the State of Sinners; the Methods and Steps by which they proceed in Sin, and the wretched Condition they are thereby brought into; as will appear by comparing one with the other in the following Particulars.

1. In the first Place, The younger Son having got his Portion into his own Hands, cares no longer to be in his Father's House, thinking that there his Liberty is too much abridged: But that he might the more effectually free himself from all sorts of Check or Restraint, that the Awe of his Father might put upon him, he gets him into a foreign Country. And thus doth it fare with Sinners: The first Step of their Miscarriage is their estranging themselves from their heavenly Father. They think it too severe a Discipline to live always under the Apprehensions and Awe of an invisible Being. And therefore they put the Thoughts of God out of their Heads as much as they can. They say unto him

Ch. 21. 14.

with the profane People in *Job*, *Depart from us, for we desire not the Knowledge of thy Ways.* It is true, where-ever they are, or whatever they do, God is present with them, whether they will or no; for there

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is no going from his Spirit, no flying from Ps. 139. 6
his Presence: But they may be properly enough said to depart from God, or to go afar off from him, while they do not consider or regard him; while they cease to maintain a constant Sense of his Justice, and Goodness, and Providence in their own Minds; while they lay aside the Care of his Worship, and neglect their Prayers and other holy Exercises; and, in a word, live at that rate, as if they were not apprehensive that there is an intelligent, omnipotent Being, who governs the World, and to whom they are accountable.

2. But to go on. The Prodigal having got into another Country, and so far enough from the Sight of his Father, allows himself all the Liberties that his Heart can desire; lives viciously and profusely, and so in a little Time spends that Stock which his Father had given him. And so it is likewise with the Sinner (who answers to him) when once he has cast off the Fear of God, and cashiered the Sense of Religion out of his Mind, (which is the best Security of Mens Innocency, and the most effectual Curb to keep them from going astray) he presently flies out into all sorts of Extravagancy and Debauchery, as his Temper and Inclination does prompt him. He gives the Reins to every Appetite and to every Passion, and takes his full Swing of unlawful Liberties and Gratifications, according

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as his Humour stands, or Temptations do present themselves. And by this Means he does in a little Time waste those Talents which God had committed to him. He besots his Understanding, he depraves and corrupts his Will, he weakens all his spiritual Powers, he hardens his Conscience, and thereby loses that quick Apprehension and Sense of Good and Evil that was put into his Mind; he squanders away his Time and Opportunities, he renders himself incapable of the Benefits and Advantages, which, if he be a Person above the common Rank, his Birth, and Education, and Circumstances in the World gave him for the Purposes of Virtue. He loses the present Assistances of the Divine Grace, and forfeits his Title to it for the future: In a word, he embezzles and consumes all that Stock, of what Nature soever it was, which God bestowed upon him for the living reasonably, and piously, and happily either in this World or in the other.

3. But further; The Prodigal having thus spent his Portion by his profuse Way of Living, is now, by reason of the Extremity of Want that is fallen upon him, forced to become a Servant. And this is the true Condition of a Sinner. The Man who lives in the constant Gratification of his Lusts and Appetites, of what Nature soever they be, how free soever God made him, yet by thus weakening and abusing his
higher

higher Powers, and not giving Check to his inferior Appetites, he is in a little Time reduced to the abject Condition of a Servant or Bondman. They who give themselves to commit Sin *are the Servants of Sin.* He that is entangled in an Habit of Vice and Wickedness is no longer at his own Disposal, but his Lusts do drag him and hurry him whithersoever they will: Reason is dethroned, and the brutish Part of the Man doth rule and domineer. A Rabble of wild Passions, blind as Chance itself, and violent and impetuous like the raging Sea, do force this poor Image of a Man to do and to suffer Things even oftentimes against his own Sense and Judgment. Tho' he hath so much Reason left as in many Cases to apprehend what is good and desirable, yet he hath no Power to pursue it: And that Evil which in his own Conscience he disapproves of, such a Slave he is to his Appetites, that he cannot forbear it. And as it is not to one Lord only that he is a Servant, but to a hundred; so, which makes the Servitude still more intolerable, those several Tyrants cannot agree among themselves, but impose Laws upon the poor Man contradictory to, and inconsistent with one another. Lust commands one Thing; Ambition another; Covetousness another; Fear another; some of them the Man must obey: And yet which soever of them he doth obey, the rest are angry, and displeased

pleased that themselves are not gratified. In one Thing indeed they do all agree and conspire, (but it is still to make him the more wretched Bondman) *viz.* that they all promote and help forwards, in their several Ways, the Rule and Interest of the great Enemy of Mankind, the Devil; for he indeed is the supreme Lord of them all, and it is his Work and Drudgery chiefly that a Man is doing all the while that he is pursuing the Gratifications of his Appetites. So that he may most properly be said to be the Slave of the Devil, as well as his own Lusts; which certainly is the most miserable Bondage in the World. This is indeed the Scripture Account of this Matter: *Whosoever, says St. John, committeth Sin is of the Devil:* and such Persons are by St. Paul said to be taken in the Snare of the Devil, and to be led Captive by him at his Will and Pleasure.

¹ John 3. 8.

² Tim. 2.

26.

4. Again; The Prodigal having thus of a Freeman made himself a Servant, see how wretchedly and basely he is used: He is put to the meanest and most contemptible Employment, even to feed Swine: And his Diet was no better than his Employment, for he is forced to eat of the Husks that are given to the Hogs.

But just thus are all they used who give themselves up to a vicious Life. God designed them for noble Employments, and so long as they preserved their Innocence,
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and kept themselves under their Father's Wing, and in his Fear and Obedience, they lived like the *Children of the most High*. Their Work was suitable to their Dignity, and becoming such excellent Natures as God had given them. Their Business was to contemplate God and his Works, and to exercise their Reasons about the best and the noblest Subjects; to sing Praises to him who was the Author of their Being, and to employ all their Faculties in the most Manly Way; to love and to do Good to all their Fellow Creatures, as they had Opportunity, which is a Godlike Part; to govern their inferiour Appetites, and keep them constantly in Subjection to the higher Spirit that was in them; so that Reason and the divine Principle sat as Empress in the Soul, and all the sensitive Passions moved orderly, regularly, and harmoniously, contributing with all Chearfulness their Service and Assistance to the Man, for the carrying on the Purposes of his noble Function. This was the Employment that our heavenly Father designed us for; and this is the Employment that all virtuous Persons, all they who live up to the Dignity of their Nature, do still follow. But oh! what a strange Change is there made when a Man departs from God, and yields up himself to the Service of his Lusts! What an infamous Drudgery is he put upon! What mean servile Offices does he busy himself about! Certainly without

a Figure we may say, that the keeping of Swine with the Prodigal is a more truly honourable Employment than that which Sinners do chuse for themselves. What can be more base and vile than for immortal Souls, made for the Fruition of the highest Good, designed for the Society of Angels, and God himself, to spend Day after Day, Year after Year, either in a dull lethargick Dose of Drowsiness and Stupidity, insensible of all Things, and minding nothing but eating, and sleeping, and playing! Or in scraping together a little Heap of finely colour'd Dirt, which in a little Time will moulder away, if not in their own Hands, yet in the Hands of those they leave it to! Or in wallowing in the filthy Puddles of Uncleanliness and Lust, which seldom fail to end in Beggary, or Shame, or Rottenness! Or in using their Bodies as they do the Vessels in their Cellars, merely for the Stowage of Drink, till there be nothing but the Shape of Man remaining! Or lastly, like Children eagerly blowing up and tossing a painted Bubble, and striving to keep it above Ground, which yet the least Puff of Wind makes to vanish into Air! And yet these are the principal Employments in which vicious Men do busy themselves. These are the Things they live for, and beyond which they have no Thought or Ambition. *Whatever is in the World* (as the Apostle tells us) *is either the Lust of the Flesh, or the Lust of the Eye,*

1 John 2.
16.

OR

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or *the Pride of Life*. Sensual Pleasures on one hand, and Wealth on another, and popular Applause or Greatness on another, are the three great Idols of the World; and whoever forsakes his God doth fall down and worship one or more of them. But are not these pitiful and contemptible Deities for a rational heaven-born Soul to prostrate itself before? Is it not a shameful Prostitution of our Natures, to make those the great Objects of our Fears, and of our Hopes, of our Love and of our Joy, and in a word, of all the Designs, and Studies, and Pursuits of our Lives? Oh the horrible Blindness and Degeneracy of Mankind! What mean despicable Creatures do we make ourselves, when we forsake the Paths of Virtue and the Commandments of our God! Alas, we cease to be Men, and put ourselves upon the same Level with the Brutes; nay, which is yet worse, to use the Prophet's Expression, it may be truly said of us, that *we debase ourselves even to Hell*. Isa. 57. 9.

And indeed suitable to the Employment of a vicious Man, is the Fare that he lives upon. As his Course of Life is not more honourable than the feeding of Swine, so neither are his Enjoyments better than those of the Prodigal. His Design is to live at Ease, free from Care and Trouble; to revel it in sensual Delights, or to please himself with the outward Splendor of his
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Condition. But, alas! he fails of his Desires and Expectations in all these Things. Such is the Contrivance of Things, that it is impossible that a vicious Man should live happily, or satisfy his own Mind, let his Circumstances be never so prosperous. Instead of solid manly Food, he only feeds upon Husks, which neither gratify a human Palate, nor afford him good Nourishment. The Mind of Man is of that Nature, that it can never be adequately filled, and contented with any outward Good, and least of all with those Goods which are enjoyed in a vicious unreasonable Manner. *Solomon*, who made more Experiments of this kind than any Man perhaps upon Earth, yet found at last to his Cost, that all those kinds of Satisfaction were but mere *Vanity and Vexation of Spirit*. All the Pleasures which the Sinner can receive from the most careful Gratification of his sensual Appetites, are but of the very same kind with those that his Hogs are capable of as well as he; only with this Difference, that their Enjoyments are more affecting and less allayed with Bitterness than his are. And can that be the Happiness of a Man, which the most stupid Creature in the World has as great a Share of as he himself?

But besides, so far are our vicious Gratifications from being Pleasures properly so called, that one may with Truth enough affirm, that, take them altogether, they have
far

far more of Uneasiness and Trouble in them than of Delight and Satisfaction. All sorts of Sinners, all who are under the Power and Dominion of their Lusts do know and feel this : The Covetous, the Proud, the Envious, the Glutton, the Drunkard, the Whoremonger, the Ambitious, the Revengeful ; all these can testify out of their own sad Experience, that when they have summ'd up the Matter, the Contentment they receive from the Gratification of these several Passions or Appetites doth no ways countervail the Pains and Restlessness, the Disturbances and Disappointments, and the manifold evil Consequences both as to their Bodies and Souls, and good Names, and Estates, which they suffer upon the Account of them.

5. But to come to the last Circumstance of the Prodigal's Condition, which the Parable mentions : As coarse and as unagreeable Fare as the Husks were, yet he would have been glad to have satisfied his Hunger even with these ; but thus much was denied him. The Text tells us, *he would fain have filled his Belly with the Husks which the Swine did eat, but no Man gave them unto him.* Oh ! wretched unhappy Man ! he who before pamper'd himself with all sorts of Delicacies, even to surfeiting, would now be glad of any sort of Food in the World, even of Husks, if he could get them. But so cruel is the Master he serves, that he

will not suffer him to fill his Belly even with these.

Now in this also we have a lively Representation of the State and Condition of the spiritual Prodigal: Just thus doth the Devil treat all those who abandon God and Virtue, to serve him and their own Lusts. The best Wages they have, is only a little sensual Pleasure, or a little empty Honour and Greatness, which are but Husks in Comparison of the noble Entertainments of Religion and a good Conscience. But even these they cannot have their Fill of; for, alas! they are obnoxious to a thousand Contingencies, which do either rob us of them, or put a Period to all the Delight and Comfort we should receive by them. They are in a very little Time either taken from the Man, or the Man from them. How can he be said to have his Fill of Wealth, who is either always craving and drudging for more, or anxiously fearful to lose what he hath? And who, notwithstanding *the Fulness of his Barns*, and the Largeness of his Possessions, and when he should say to himself, *Soul, eat and drink and be merry, for thou hast Goods laid up for many Years*, shall hear one of these two Voices, *Thou Fool, this Night shall thy Goods be taken from thee*, or, which is worse, *Thou Fool, this Night shall thy Soul be taken from thee, and then whose will all these Things be?* And is there any greater Hopes for the Ambitious,

Luke 12.
19, 20.

tious, that they shall have their Fill of what their Souls most desire? Alas! no. As easily may they make the Wind to blow always in one Quarter, or keep the Sea from its constant Ebbings and Flowings, as they can secure to themselves the uncertain Favour of great Men, or the more uncertain Breath of the People. And as for bodily Pleasures, what do the most delicious of them signify, when the Appetites to them are decayed and perished? as certainly they will be, when the Vigour and Briskness of a Man's Constitution wears off, and the Powers of Nature grow feeble and languid; which Old Age will undoubtedly bring to pass, but most frequently Riots and Debauches do the Business before that comes. But besides all this that I have said, how is it possible for a Sinner to have his Fill of any of these Things? Or what Comfort, what Satisfaction can any of them afford him under a multitude of other unfortunate afflicting Circumstances, which he is unavoidably exposed to? Can he say, I will refresh myself with Play, or Wine, or Musick, when he lies languishing on a sick Bed? Or will his Heaps of Treasure charm the Gout, or Stone, or Cholick, that they shall put him to no Pain? Or can he take any Satisfaction from the Cringes of the People, or the Compliments of his Friends, when his Mind is ruffled with a great many secret and almost heart-breaking Disappoint-

ments? Or lastly, can all these Things together yield any Balm for the healing an ulcerated Conscience, which in the midst of the greatest Affluence, the most luxurious Entertainments, the most pleasing Flatteries and Applauses, makes the vicious Man to tremble and look pale with the bitter Reflections of his Life past, and the dismal Prospect he has of what is to come? Alas! in none of these Cases can he purchase any Quiet or Repose to his own Mind from the Possession of any of these Things, which the World calls great and happy. He is not at all the better for them, because he is out of the Capacity of enjoying them: he feels no Relish or Gusto in them. And indeed in these Circumstances it is all one whether he hath them or be without them. But supposing he was in a Condition at all Times as long as he lives uninterruptedly to fill and satisfy his Appetites with these Things, without the Disturbance of Sickness, of Afflictions, of Disappointments, and, which is worst of all, of a guilty Conscience, (which yet in the Nature of Things is impossible) yet this Misery will still attend him, he cannot enjoy these Things always. The Time is coming on apace when he must part with all these, his Friends, and Comforters; the Shadows of the Evening will in a little Time be stretched out upon him, and he must go into the Regions of Death; and then he must bid an everlasting Farewel
to

to the Light of his Eyes, to the Desire of his Soul, and to the Idols of his Life; and when this is a coming upon him, he will feel a sore Want indeed. Then he will sadly say, with the Prodigal, *How many hired Servants are there in my Father's House, that have Bread enough; but lo! I perish with Hunger.* He calls for his Pleasures; but they are all departed, gone as a Dream when one awaketh. He calls for his Wealth, which, with so much Anxiety and Toil, he hath amassed together; but that is upon the Wing, to fly to a new Heir, that will perchance spend it more profusely, than he got it sordidly: And all his gay Feathers, in which he prided himself, and with which he endeavour'd to soar above others, are now pluck'd from him, and he is left the most naked, despicable Thing in the whole World. He hath nothing in the Earth to turn himself to in this Extremity; which Way soever he casts his Eyes, he sees nothing but what will fill him with Horror. If he looks inwards, there all is Hell, and Despair, and Confusion; there he finds a Soul all over foul and leprous, oppressed with intolerable Loads of the blackest Guilt, and filled with the Remembrance of a thousand Instances of Folly and Baseness, and the ugliest Ingratitude. If he looks about him, he sees all his Friends and Companions taking their last Leave of him, and as they forsake him, his great Master,

the Devil, with his frightful Guard about him (whose Interest he hath so faithfully pursued, and whose Drudgery he hath been doing all his Life) ready to claim their own, and seize upon the trembling Soul, as it parts from the Body. Lastly, if he looks upwards, he sees an angry offended God, whose Laws he hath affronted, whose Threatnings he hath despised, whose Grace he hath turned into Wantonness, and whose holy Spirit he hath done Despite to. He sees the Judge of the World summoning him to appear at his dreadful Tribunal, to give an Account of all the Talents he hath misemployed, of all the precious Time he hath mis-spent, of all the Riots and Debauches, all the Frauds and unjust Dealings, all the Oaths and Blasphemies, all the lewd Intrigues; and, in a Word, all the wicked Designs and prophane Words, and evil Actions of his whole Life: And he seems to hear that terrible Sentence sounding in his Ears, which will most certainly be pronounced upon him, and all such as he is, at the last Day. *Go, ye Cursed, into everlasting Fire, prepared for the Devil and his Angels.* Oh, miserable State! Oh, dismal Conclusion of a sinful Life! But these are the natural Fruits and Consequences of forsaking God, and giving our selves over to a Course of Vice and Impiety. Nor is there any Possibility of preventing or averting

Matt. 25.
41.

averting those Consequences, unless, with the Prodigal in the Text, we do in Time *come to our selves*, and enter into a serious Consideration of our Ways, and upon that Consideration *arise and go to our Father.*

II. Which leads me to the second Head of my Discourse, which is the Prodigal's Return, as it is expressed in my Text; of which I shall discourse very briefly, because I have spent so much Time upon the former.

The Account that is given of the Prodigal's Return, is this, that *when he came to himself, he said, How many hired Servants of my Father have Bread enough, and I perish with Hunger? I will arise, and go to my Father.* Here now, I say, we have a lively Representation of the Beginning and Progress of Repentance after a vicious Life.

The Prodigal being now pinched with Extremity of Want, comes at last to himself: He begins to look about him, and to weigh and debate Things seriously in his own Mind. Whilst he was in the Height of his Prosperity, he drove on furiously, not attending to any Thing but the Pursuit of his Riots and Debauches: He seem'd to live without thinking, without any kind of Reflection, either upon what was passed, or what was to come; he was as one that was dosed with Wine, or delirious with a Fever. Indeed he could not properly be

said to be in his Wits: But the miserable Circumstances of his Condition do at last awaken him, and bring him to his right Senses; and then he begins to deliberate and make Use of his Reason. He then enters into a sad Consideration of the Happiness he hath lost, and the wretched Condition he is in, and his own Folly that brought him into it, and what it must end in, if there was not some speedy Course taken, some present Means used for the getting out of it. And this Consideration puts him at least upon serious Resolutions to apply himself to his Father, as the only Refuge that was left him in this World.

And thus it fares with every spiritual Prodigal, who, after a vicious Course of Life, doth at last return to his Duty. The first Step of his Repentance is a serious Sense of his Condition. Till he begins to think, and reflect, and consider, there are no Hopes of him; but when thro' some good Providence or other (either a Fit of Sickness, or some other sharp Affliction, or the Arguments and Intreaties of his Friends, or some visible Judgment of God inflicted upon the Companions of his riotous Courses, or the reading some good Book, or the hearing some warm Discourse;) I say, when by any of these, or such other Methods (which God usually makes Use of for the awakening of Sinners) he is brought to a Sense of his Condition, begins to cool,
and

and in good Earnest to lay Things to Heart, and debate Matters seriously with himself; then he gives some Appearances of a Probability, that he may, in time, rescue himself from the Bondage of his Lusts, and the Snares of the Devil, and become a Convert to Virtue and Piety.

Here therefore all of us who have gone astray with the Prodigal, but have not yet returned with him; here, I say, we are to lay the Foundation of Repentance, *viz.* in deep and serious Consideration: And I would to God we would all do it presently, that we would stop our Carriere a little time, and give ourselves Leave to think; that we would no longer blindly and furiously pursue our Appetites, but open our Eyes a little, and awake from our Frenzy or our Lethargy. Oh! that we would at last come to ourselves, as the Prodigal did, and resume the Exercise of our long abandoned Reason; that we would do as *David* adviseth, *Stand in Awe, and commune with our own Hearts, and in our Chamber, and be still;* Psalms 44. that we would sit down, and sedately ponder with ourselves where we have all this while been, and what we have been a doing, and whither all this tends, what will be the Issue and Conclusion of our Riots and vicious Courses, if we persevere any longer in them. Oh! if we were thus wise, if we did thus consider, I doubt not but through the Grace of God, we should, in a very

very little Time feel a mighty Change in our own Minds; and the next News would be, that we should imitate the Prodigal in the second Step he made to his Repentance, *viz.* enter into most firm Purposes and Resolutions to quit our lewd Courses, and to return to our heavenly Father, from whom we have so long and so unaccountably estranged ourselves.

Now to persuade all of you, who are concerned, thus to *come to yourselves*, and thus to enter into serious Counsels and Considerations about your own everlasting Interests, is that which I design in what I have further to say at this Time: And in order hereunto, two Things I desire to lay before you.

I. First of all, that it is this Want of thinking and reflecting, and coming to yourselves, that hath been the great Occasion of all your past Sins and Follies.

II. That if you be once prevailed upon to come to yourselves, and seriously to apply your Minds to the Consideration of your own spiritual Affairs, you cannot avoid the being brought to true Repentance. Serious Thinking, if it be practised and continued, will certainly have at last the same Effect upon you that it had upon the Prodigal; it will necessarily put you upon a hearty Return to your Father.

Of

Of these two Things very briefly, and I have done.

1. It is the Want of thinking and reflecting that is the great Occasion of all the Miscarriages of our Lives. It is not to be denied, that our Natures are bad enough, and our Propensity to Sin is very great and lamentable; but yet I am confident, it is not so much *that* which hurries us into so many sorts of Follies and Vices, as our Rashness and Inconsideration. We will not give ourselves Liberty to think and reflect upon the Consequences of our Actions before we venture upon them, but blindly rush into them; and hence comes the great Degeneracy of human Kind. We follow our present Inclinations, and attend no further than just to what the Object before us, or the Circumstances we are engaged in, do prompt us to; and thus we are at first betray'd into Sin: And after we have done a sinful Action once, or twice, or thrice, it goes down more glibly and easily afterward, and so by Degrees it becomes familiar to us, till at last our Sins grow habitual and customary, and then it is no easy Matter to conquer them. The Truth is, if it be examined, it will be found, that Want of Consideration is the Fountain of most of the Miscarriages of Mankind. What is it that makes any Man an Atheist, or at least to call in Question the Being of God and Providence, but merely that he will not give himself
Leave

Leave to think; will not be at the Pains, with Coolness and Indifferency, to view the manifest Effects and Footsteps, which everywhere, and in every Thing, are to be discovered of an infinite Power, Wisdom, and Goodness? And the same Thing we say of all those among us, who are Infidels or Scepticks as to the Christian Religion. If there be any Man that is such, it is not because he wants Evidence for the Truth of the Gospel (for there is enough to convince the most curious Enquirer upon Earth) but because he will not consider. He runs on in a Road of worldly Business or Sensuality, and cannot find either Time or Humour to enter into a serious and strict Enquiry into Things of this Nature. If a Man would but use his Reason fairly, and calmly attend to the Arguments, that are, or may be every Day offered to his Mind for the convincing him of the Being of God, or the Truth of Christ's Religion, he could almost as soon not be a Man, as be an Atheist or an Unbeliever. And thus, as to the particular Immoralities of our Lives, I would ask the most profligate profane Person, whether he thinks it would be possible for him to live in the Practice of common Oaths and Imprecations, if every time that he had a Temptation to swear, or damn himself or those about him, he did seriously consider, that it is the dreadful Name of God that he is now going to affront, who stands by, and

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is a Witness of his Blasphemy, and that he is taking the ready Course to damn himself in good Earnest by this lewd Abuse of his Tongue.

Again, what is it but mere Sottishness and Inconsideration that makes any Man follow a Trade of Drunkenness and Sensuality? He could hardly turn himself into such a Brute, if his Mind was scarce ever so little attentive to the dismal Consequences that he draws upon himself, both as to his Business, his Health, his Parts, his Estate, his Posterity; to all these, as well as his Soul, in following such a Course of Life.

In a Word, it is Stupidity and Unthinkingness that undoes us all. We may pretend the Unhappiness of our Education, or the Badness of our Natures, or the Force of Temptations, or the irresistible Baits of Pleasure or Gain, or the bewitching Charms of Company; I say, we may pretend all these Things in Excuse for our careless or vicious Lives: But when all is done, it is our own Rashness and Inconsideration that ought generally to bear the greatest Blame. If we would but so order our Affairs as to have the Arguments and Motives to Religion seriously and frequently present to our Minds, if we would vouchsafe them a Place in our Hearts, and meditate upon them, and digest them, it is impossible that a great many of us should live as we do. Let but a Man ponder deeply and often upon the Shortness
and

and Uncertainty of his Life, the Madness and the Folly, the Shame and Uneasiness of all sorts of Sin; the Joy, the Peace, and the continual Feast of Innocency and a good Conscience; the serious Desire that God hath that we should all be happy, his continual Goodness expressed in a Thousand Instances, which should lead us to Repentance; the severe Account that we must one Day give of all our Actions; the unspeakably glorious and immortal Life that we may attain to by Holiness and Virtue, and the everlasting Punishment in Hell-fire, with the Devil and his Angels, that does certainly await all lewd, profane, ungodly, impenitent Sinners: I say, let but a Man seriously and constantly fix his Thoughts upon these Things, and I dare challenge him to be a bad Man, if he can; I dare challenge him to live in Whoredom or Drunkenness, or in any other wicked Course, if he can.

2. And this leads me to the other Thing I have to represent about this Business, and with it I conclude, *viz.* that where-ever serious Thinking and Reflection is practised and continued, it never fails to produce Reformation in the Man that useth it.

And here I cannot but take Notice of one Thing. It is very observable, that when Christianity was first preach'd by our Saviour, it had strange visible Effects upon the Hearts and Lives of Men. In those Days, no sooner had a Man taken upon him the Profession

Profession of the Gospel, but he became a good Man, a holy Liver, a Mortifier of all his carnal Lusts and Appetites; he became dead to the World, and all the Vanities of it, despised all earthly Pleasures and Glories, and was ready to lay down his Life for his Lord and Master, whenever he was called to it. It was then a strange uncouth Thing to hear of a lewd, vicious, debauch'd Christian.

But now in these Days, tho' we have the same Religion, tho' the same Doctrines be preached, the same Arguments enforced, the same Assistances of God's Grace and Spirit afforded, yet we see there are none, or but very few of these Effects amongst us. Christianity looks like another Thing. We can now believe the Gospel, and communicate with the Church in all her Offices, and hear our Sins reprov'd, and our Duty told us, and all the glorious Promises of Christ displayed to us, and the dreadful Threatnings of God denounced against us, and yet we are still the same Persons that we were before. We continue as vain and as loose in our Conversation as ever, as uncharitable, and worldly-minded, as wrathful, and peevish, and censorious, as if we were still in the Darkness of Heathenism, and the Gospel had never been preached to us. What now is the Reason of this strange Disparity between the Effects of the Gospel then and those now? Why truly the greatest Reason seems to be this, that

that the Christians in those former Times did seriously consider their Religion, and weigh its Arguments and Motives, but we do not. They took up their Christianity by Choice, and we by Chance or Education. They, at their first Entrance upon the Profession of the Gospel, gave themselves the Trouble of a diligent Enquiry into the Doctrines and Duties of it, and the Evidences for it; they consider'd the Goodness and Reasonableness of the Precepts, the Greatness of the Promises, and the mighty Encouragements to Holiness and Virtue it laid upon Mankind: And all these Things they thought so long upon, till they found themselves transformed into the Spirit and Temper of Jesus the Author of it; till they found in themselves such Fruits and Effects, as so excellent a Religion ought in Reason to produce: And such Fruits and Effects will always be produced, where the same Consideration and Application of Mind is used.

But farther, to shew the mighty Influence that serious Consideration hath upon a good Life, I ought also to take Notice of this, that even in our Days, as barren and ineffectual as our Religion proves among us, as hardened, and as insensible as we seem to be, yet there is none of us, but if we are at any Time, upon any Occasion, brought to a serious Consideration of our own Ways, and of the Concernments of our Souls, we presently find ourselves changed; we are in a
Manner

Manner another sort of Men. We have new Thoughts, new Desires, new Purposes, and Resolutions; and if that Thinking and Consideration did continue, we should, without Doubt, change our Lives in Deed, as well as we do then in Purpose. This we see frequently in sick Persons; they who have been the most careless of Men, they who have most despised Religion, who have been Proof against all the Arguments of it while they were in Health, yet when they come to their sick Beds, and begin to be awakened by the Apprehension of Death, into a serious Consideration of their own State, how strangely are they affected? how much do they repent of their former Actions? how absolutely necessary doth Virtue and a holy Life then appear to them? how full are they of strong Resolutions to amend their Ways, if ever God restore them to Health again? how earnestly do they ask God's Pardon for what is past, and pray for his Grace for the future?

What now is the Reason of all this? there was the same Difference between Virtue and Vice before. They had the same Arguments to fly the one, and to pursue the other before; only they now deeply consider them, and apply them to their own Hearts, which before they did not. They before liv'd at random; but now thinking it no Time to fool or trifle any longer, they begin to entertain more serious Counsels concerning themselves.

And thus will it always be with all Persons in all Circumstances. If they can once be brought seriously to reflect and consider, there is a good Step made towards their Repentance; and if they continue their Considerations, there is no doubt but they will at last become truly virtuous and holy Persons.

Oh! that we would now begin to apply our Minds seriously to our spiritual Concernments, and entertain the same Thoughts that we shall be sure to have when we come to die! Oh, what a World of Trouble, Care, and Consideration would it save us, which will certainly some time or other come upon us! We cannot always live without Thinking. A Time will come, when we shall consider and reflect, whether we will or no. A Time will come, when we shall not be able to divert our Thoughts from those Things, which we are now so loth to think upon; and perhaps it may be then too late. Oh, happy they, who do, with the Prodigal, *come to themselves* in time, before their Father's Mercies be shut up against them! do with him so consider their Ways, as to take up the same Resolution that he did, *I will arise, &c.*

S.E.R.



SERMON IV.

Of the true Notion of Scandals and Offences. Popular Misapprehensions about them rectify'd. Use to be made of the Consideration of their ill Consequences and Frequency, &c.

Preach'd before King William, 1701.

MATTH. XVIII. 7.

Woe unto the World, because of Offences; for it must needs be that Offences come. But Woe unto that Man by whom the Offence cometh.



OUR Saviour, in the Verse before, had been saying, that *whosoever* Ver. 6. *should offend one of these little ones that believe in him, it were better for him that a Mill-stone were hanged about his Neck, and that he were drowned in the Depth of the Sea.* And in the next Words he adds what I have now read, *Woe unto the World, &c.* We may gather

ther from the former Verse, what a grievous Thing it is in God's Account to offend our Brethren, even the meanest of them; and we may gather from the latter Verse, that yet notwithstanding, this is a Thing that is like to be frequently practised in the World, Men will be giving Offence to others, tho' *Woe be to the Man by whom the Offence cometh.* Since therefore this Sin of offending our Brethren is declared to be so great, and withal so common, I think it concerns all of us to be rightly instructed wherein it doth consist, that so we may not, thro' our Mistakes and false Notions about it, either be troubled in our Minds for having committed it when we have not, or be encouraged from the common Practice of the World, to do such Actions, as will really bring us under the Guilt of it.

The *Greek* Word, which we here translate *Offences*, is *σκανδαλα*, and from hence *σκανδαλίζειν* to offend, and *σκανδαλιζέσθαι* to be offended. These Words are used in the New Testament above forty times, and, I believe, always in the same Sense. But the *English* Words by which we render them, viz. *Offences*, and *to offend*, and *to be offended*, as they are used by us in common Speech, do, by no means, give us a true Idea of what is meant by those *Greek* Words in the sacred Writers: Nor would it much mend the Matter, if instead of *Offences*, we would say *Scandals*, and instead of offending we should

should say *scandalizing*, and instead of being offended, we should say *being scandalized*; for tho' these be *English* Words now, and of the very same Sound with the *Greek*, and are indeed taken from them, yet as we commonly apply them, they have a quite different Sense in our Language from what those Terms have in Scripture. This Word *σκάνδαλον* (upon which the two other depend) when it is taken in its proper Sense, signifies one of these two Things, *viz.* either a *Trap* or a *Snare* to catch one in, or a *Block*, or a *Stone* that is laid in the Way, at which People in the Dark are apt to stumble and fall. In the first Signification it is used in the 69th *Psalms*, *Let their Table be made a* Ver. 23. *Snare to them*; where, in the *Greek*, it is *Let their Table be made a Scandal*: And in another *Psalms*, *They set Scandals in my Way*, where our *English* rightly renders, *they set Traps in my Way*. In the other Signification it is taken in the 19th of *Lev.* *Thou shalt not* Ver. 14. *put a Scandal before the Blind*, that is, as we have translated it, *thou shalt not put a Stumbling-block before the Blind*. And several such Instances are to be given.

This now being the primary Sense of the Word *Scandal*, when it is used properly and without a Figure, we may easily from hence gather what the true Notion of it is, when it is used metaphorically, or in a moral Signification, as it is here in my Text, and in all the others, where it is translated by the

Word Offence; for what a *Trap* or a *Snare* is to a Beast, or what a *Stumbling-block* in the Way is to one that is blind, or to one who walketh in the Dark, the same Thing, that which we call an Offence, is to a Man's Soul, viz. any Thing by which a Man's Soul is endangered, any Thing that occasions his Fall into Sin, any Thing whereby he is hindered and discouraged from doing what he ought to do, or drawn away to do that which he ought not to do. In a Word, an Offence, such as my Text speaks of, is any Impediment that a Man meets with in the Way of Religion and Godliness.

Ver. 6.

Taking now this along in our Minds, we have an easy Account, not only of the Text I am now upon, but of all the others where this Word is used: But I confine myself at this Time to my Text. *Whosoever, saith our Saviour, shall offend one of these little ones that believe in me, it were better that a Mill-stone were hanged about his Neck. — Offend one of these little ones, what is that? Whosoever shall lay any Snares or Stumbling-blocks before them, whereby they are diverted from their Christian Profession, or made to depart from that good Way in which they are entered; whosoever shall thus seduce the meanest Christian, whether it be by Terror or by Allurement, Woe be to that Man, he hath contracted an horrid Guilt. And then come in the Words of my Text, Woe be to the World because of Offences, for it must needs be that*
Offences

Offences come; but Woe to that Man by whom the Offence cometh; that is, as if our Saviour had said, Mankind is in a dangerous Condition upon Account of the many Temptations they are exposed to in the Way of Godliness. The Variety of Occasions they will meet with in the World, either to keep them from a Holy and Christian Life, or to make them depart from it, after they have engag'd in it. It is indeed unavoidable but that such Temptations and Occasions to sin will be continually thrown in their Way; but let them look to it, who are the Authors or the Causes of them, for they have much to answer for to Almighty God upon Account thereof.

Having thus given you the plain Sense of my Text, I desire, before I enter further into the Points contain'd in it, to make two or three Reflections upon what I have already said concerning the Notion of Scandals or Offences.

1. And first of all, it appears, that the common Opinion which People among us have taken up about *giving Offence*, hath no Ground or Foundation in the holy Scripture, Men judging of this Matter by the mere Sound of the *English* Word, usually run away with this, that *to offend*, or *to give an Offence* to another, is to do any Thing that may grieve or displease him, or make him angry with us; and upon that Account some take themselves to be obliged in Conscience

to avoid all those Things, which some well-meaning Persons they converse with, do not like or approve of, as thinking, that every Action they do, which is disagreeable to their Humours, is really a giving Offence to them in a Sense that our Saviour here forbids. I do readily grant, that no Man should willingly or causelessly do any Action, at which another may be grieved or displeased. Civility and good Manners will oblige us to it, or if that do not, I am sure Christian Charity will. But then, I say, it is one Thing to *grieve* or *displease* our Brother, and another Thing to *scandalize* him, or to *give him Offence*; for, as I have shewn, we then only do this latter, when we lay Snares and Temptations before him, that may endanger his Virtue, and occasion his falling into Sin. The Truth is, if this was the Sin of giving Scandal, to act contrary to the Humours and Sentiments of others, it would be impossible for any Man to live so, as not to be almost daily guilty of it; for there are few of the common Actions that a Man doth, so clear and unexceptionable, but that there are those to be met with, who will censure and condemn them, and be angry with the Man that doth them.

2. Another Thing we may collect from this Account we have been giving of Scandals and Offences, is this, that they who are most apt to complain of their being scandalized or offended with some Things which they

they see others do, are really least in Danger of being so in the true Sense of the Word; or, if they be indeed scandalized or offended by those Things, they, of all others, deserve the least Compassion: For a Scandal or an Offence being nothing else but a Stumbling-block laid before one to make him fall, or a Snare put in his Way to entrap him in a Sin, for any Man to say, that he is scandalized with this or the other Action which he sees his Neighbour do, is to suppose, that he is sensible that that Action is a Block in his Way, and may occasion his Fall; that he is aware that it is a great Temptation to him to sin against God. Now, in this Case, I say, he either is not scandalized, or, if he be, he is extremely to be blamed for it; for, if he resists the Temptation, and keeps close to his Duty, notwithstanding this Occasion of sinning, then he is not scandalized or offended, because he avoids the Offence. On the other Side, if he close with the Temptation, knowing it as he doth, and be ensnared in the Sin, having his Eyes thus opened to see the Danger, what Pity doth he deserve? He is to be accounted a wilful presumptuous Transgressor.

3. Another Thing which I observe from this Doctrine of Offences, is this, that we are oftentimes in as much Danger of scandalizing and offending others, by pleasing them, and complying with their Humours, as by doing such Things as are offensive and distasteful

distasteful to them. Thus, for Instance, to give a Man Money, when we are morally certain, that he will spend it in such Ways as will either be hurtful to himself or others; or to set strong Drink before a Man, who has already drunk beyond the Pitch of Temperance; in both these Cases the Humours of the Men are pleased and gratified; but yet, in Truth, we do, in both these Instances, really scandalize or offend them, in the Scripture Sense of the Word; because we do directly lay a Snare and Temptation before them to commit Sin. Whereas, if we had been less kind in the one Case, and less civil in the other, though we had displeased them by being so, we had avoided the giving Scandal, and done more agreeably to our Duty. And thus it is in all Cases, where a Man lies under any criminal Mistake, or goes on in the Pursuit of any vicious Inclination or evil Custom. The Danger here of offending them doth not lie in opposing their Humours or thwarting them in these Ways, or by shewing by our Words and Actions how much we disapprove of them, but by complying with them, and by our Silence, or our Countenance, encouraging them in their sinful Prejudices or vicious Courses. *Mat. 18. 22.*

4. Another Thing to be taken Notice of upon this Occasion, is this, that a Man cannot be guilty of offending his Brother in the Scripture Sense of the Word, so long as he is doing his Duty. Or, if ever it does happen,

pen, that any one is drawn or led to commit a Sin; by seeing another do any Action that he is really bound to do; in that Case the Sin lies wholly at his own Door, nor hath that other Man any Thing to answer for it: Here is indeed an Offence taken, but here is none given. The one Man is really scandalized and offended, but the other Man not being the Cause of it, is not to be blamed for it, and the Reason of this is evident. No Man can be obliged to Contradictions, and therefore all the Parts of a Man's Duty must be consistent one with another; and if so, then it cannot be supposed, that at the same time a Man is obeying a Law of God, he should at the same time sin against his Neighbour, as he really must do, if by any Action of his that was a Duty, he could give Offence, or lay a Stumbling-block before his Neighbour. The Use that I make of this, is, that we are not to forbear any Action, when either the Laws of God, or the Laws of Man, whether Ecclesiastical or Civil, have obliged us to (so long as those Laws of Man are not inconsistent with the Laws of God) for Fear of giving Offence to others; for if any be scandalized at our performing our Duty (as certainly it is every Man's Duty to obey God and his lawful Superiors) it is their Fault, and none of ours.

5. There is one Thing more that is fit to be added, and then, I think, we have taken in all the material Difficulties that can happen

pen in this Business, of giving Offence to our Brethren; and that is this, that tho' we can give no Scandal or Offence to any by any Action that it is our Duty to do, yet it may sometimes happen, that we may give Offence to others by an indiscreet Use of our Liberty in Things which are otherwise lawful. My Meaning is this: A direct tempting of Men to sin, or the doing any ill Thing by which others may be encouraged to sin; these are not the only Instances in which a Man may offend his Brethren (tho' indeed these are the most notorious and most common) but a Man may give Offence also in the forbidden Sense, when he doth some Action lawful in itself to be done, and perhaps likewise done by him with an innocent Design, but which he foresees may probably be an Inducement or an Occasion to draw others into some Sin; I say, even this is a giving Offence, and laying a Stumbling-block before our Brethren. It is certain that every Man is bound, in Charity to his Brother's Soul, thus far to deny himself, *viz.* as to forbear those Actions which otherwise he might lawfully do, when the Case so happens, that those Actions, if they be done, will in all Probability be a Snare to others to do something that they ought not to do. And this is the very Case about which St. Paul is so large in the 14th Chap. of his *Epistle to the Romans*, and 8th and 10th Chapters of the 1st *Epistle to the Corinthians*, where he treats of

of this Argument. The Sum of his Discourse of Scandals in these Epistles, comes to this, that in Matters purely indifferent, which are neither tied upon us by the Laws of God nor Man, but it is perfectly left at our Liberty whether we will act or not act. in all these Cases we should have so much Regard to the Ignorance and Infirmities and Prejudices of those we converse with, as rather to forbear the Practice of those Things which are otherwise lawful, and we may freely do, than by using our Liberty in such Things, to give Encouragement to other Mens Sins, or to be a blameable Occasion of another Man's Fall.

Having thus far treated of the Nature of Scandals and Offences, in order to the rectifying some popular Misapprehensions about them, I proceed now to say a little (and it shall be but a little) to those Points, which the Text I am upon doth more particularly suggest to our Consideration, with Relation to this Matter.

Woe unto the World, says our Saviour, because of Offences; it must needs be that Offences come, but Woe unto that Man by whom the Offence cometh.

Three Things here our Saviour declares unto us.

I. The Dangers and sad Consequences that Scandals or Offences do bring upon Mankind.
Woe unto the World because of Offences.

II. The

II. The Necessity and Unavoidableness of them. *It must needs be that Offences come.*

III. The heinous Guilt and Punishment of those who are the Authors of them. *But Woe unto that Man by whom the Offence cometh.*

Of these three Points very briefly.

I. We have here set forth the Danger and sad Consequences that Offences bring upon Mankind; *Woe*, &c. And indeed this *Woe* that our Lord pronounced hath been too sadly made good in all Ages from his Time to this. Mankind has ever been, and are still in a woful deplorable Condition, thro' the manifold Offences and Scandals that have been thrown in their Way. To pass by former Times, and only to speak of our own. If any Man looks abroad into the World, he cannot but be sensible, that the Dangers to which Men are exposed upon this Account are infinite, and the Consequences of them very fatal to abundance of People. What thro' the Atheism, and the Infidelity, and the No-Religion of Men on one Hand, and thro' the Scepticism, and Heresies, and false Religion of many on the other; what thro' the Multitude of ill Examples that are every Day given, and the manifold Enticements to Vice and Debauchery that all Places do abound with; what thro' the Persuasions

and

and Allurements of insinuating Companions, and the Frowns and Discouragements of another Sort, who *think it strange*, as the Apostle *1 Pet. 4. 4.* speaks, *if we run not with them into the same Excess of Riot*: I say, what thro' these, and other Scandals (for all these are most properly Scandals and Stumbling-blocks) which Persons of all Ages, and Sexes, and Ranks, do meet with, the World is at that Pass, that really it is a most hazardous Thing to live in it: Nor is there any Condition or State of Life so safe, but that one is in Danger of making Shipwreck of his Virtue; and how well soever one is inclined, he no sooner comes abroad into the World, but he runs a great Risk of being corrupted either in his Principles or his Morals, either of becoming a Misbeliever or an Unbeliever, or a vicious Liver. And indeed we cannot wonder at it, when we consider how natural a Thing it is for a Man to get the same Opinions and Sentiments of Things which they have with whom he converseth, and how hard to resist the Importunity of Friends, or to stand out against the Violence of great Temptations; how difficult not to be obliged by Kindness, or frightened with Discouragements; what Charms there are in agreeable Conversation, and how uneasy a Life it is to be always wrestling against a Torrent of Examples, especially when Pleasure, or Interest, or the Favour of great Men do plead on their Side: These Things being considered, it is no Wonder

Wonder that the Temptations and Stumbling-blocks, which are daily thrown before Men in the Way of Religion and Virtue, should have such a direful Influence and Success upon their Minds and Manners as they have, and that upon the Account thereof so many are perverted from the good Way they were in, and so many hardened in false Principles and vicious Courses.

The Use I would make of this Point at present (tho' a great many others might be made) is this: Since the Offences that happen in the World render it so dangerous a Place, it will highly concern all those, who have the Charge of others committed to them, to be wonderfully careful, both to keep them from these Offences, and to arm and fortify their Minds against them. Tho' there be no certain infallible Fence against the Mischiefs of the Scandals of this World, yet the best and surest Fence there is, is a good Education, and being seasoned with virtuous Principles in our tender Years. It behoves therefore all Parents, and others who have young People in their Care, to look diligently to this, to see that they be trained up in the Fear of God, to set good Examples before them of Sobriety, and Honesty, and good Nature, and a religious Conversation; to possess their Minds with a hearty and deep Sense of the Difference between Good and Evil, the Ways of God and the Ways of Sin, and the indispensable Ob-
ligation

ligation that is upon them both, in order to their living happily here and hereafter; to pursue the one, and avoid the other; to instruct them in the Principles of the true Religion, and to furnish them with Arguments both against Error and Vice: And lastly, when there is a Necessity of sending them abroad from under their own Wing, to make such Provisions for them, and to dispose them into such Circumstances of living, as that they may both know how to spend their Time innocently and usefully, and withal be obnoxious to as few Dangers and Temptations as their Condition will admit. These Endeavours, together with our hearty Prayers to God for his Blessing upon them, are the most certain Expedients to secure our Children from the horrible Mischiefs and Inconveniencies that the Multitude of Scandals bring upon the World. And indeed I might appeal to Experience for the Truth of this. Persons, who have this Care taken of their Education, do not often miscarry; and tho' it may now and then happen to be the Misfortune of some of them to be over-born by Temptations, nay, and perhaps for some Time of their Lives, to give themselves a Loose to a Course of Vice and Immorality, yet generally the good Principles wherewith their Minds were seasoned in their Youth, do, thro' God's Grace, some Time or other, operate, and have their due Effect at last.

Luke 17.1
ἀναγκαῖον ἔστι
ἵνα ἔσται.

2. The second Thing that our Saviour here declares to us, is the Unavoidableness of those Scandals among Mankind. *It must needs be, &c.* The Greek Word is ἀνάγκη γάρ ἐστι, *there is a Necessity for it.* St. Luke expresses it by ἀδύνατον ἔστι, *it is impossible but Offences will come.* And indeed the Reason is very plain why they must come; for so long as there is a Multitude of evil Angels about us, who malign the Welfare of Mankind, and make it their Business to sow Tares where Christ has sown his good Seed; and so long as there are Men in the World, who do carry on the Interests of that Kingdom of Darkness, either by teaching Doctrines which are contrary to Christian Truth, or by promoting Practices contrary to Christian Holiness: In a Word, so long as God is pleased to permit in the World, either the Temptations of the Devil, or the Follies and Sins of Mankind, so long it *must needs be that Offences will come.*

But some may say, is it not a great Flaw in the divine Providence, that he suffers these Things? Doth it not seem very incongruous and unbecoming that Care which we all believe God takes of Mankind, to expose them thus to Scandals and Stumbling-blocks, which he knows to be so dangerous, and of such fatal Consequence to many of them? I answer, No, it doth not: There is nothing in this Proceeding, but what suits very well with all God's Attributes. If he has made
Men

Men free Agents, and given them such Natures as they may either do well or do ill, then it is but reasonable that he should suffer them to act according to those Natures; and if he do so suffer them, then all those Effects we have spoken of, will follow. God is no-ways the Author those Scandals, and therefore they are not in any-wise to be charged upon him: But Men, by abusing their Liberty, and yielding to the Temptations of the Devil, are the Causes of them. Nor is it reasonable, that God should interpose his Omnipotence for the putting a Stop to them, because that would be to deal with Mankind in a Way contrary to their own Natures, and to put a Force upon free Agents: But then here appears the Wisdom and Goodness of divine Providence; tho' God does not hinder these Things, yet he so orders the Matter, that excellent Ends are served by them. He, who brings Light out of Darkness, can, and doth bring a great deal of Good to Mankind by these grievous Evils: For by these Scandals and Offences which happen in the World, 1. The Reality and Sincerity of Mens Pretensions to Religion are effectually tried. 2. The Graces and Virtues of the Good are hereby extreamly improved. And lastly, the Consequence of that, is a vast Increase of Glory to them, in the Day when our Lord Jesus shall come to judge the World.

The Use I make of this Point is this. Since it must needs be that Offences come, since, according to the Course of this World, there will be always so many Temptations and Stumbling-blocks laid before Men in the Way of Virtue and Godliness, let no Man be surprized when he meets with them, or stand amazed, as if some strange and unusual Thing had happened unto him. There is nobody must think or expect to pass his Time in this World in so profound an Ease and Undisturbedness, but that his Virtue will be exposed to frequent, nay, and sometimes to difficult Trials. What therefore has every one to do, but to prepare himself for them; to put his Affairs in such a Posture, as that he may be in a Readiness to encounter them. The Offences of this World do really make the Life of a Christian to be a constant Warfare, and accordingly it is often so stiled in the New Testament; and therefore, whosoever takes upon him that Life, it will concern him to have his Eyes open, and always to stand upon his Guard; to look every Day for Assaults of one Kind or other, and accordingly to be prepared for them: But how is that to be done? Why, by being watchful over our own Actions, and considering well before-hand what Business, or what Company we engage in; by fortifying our Minds with good Resolutions, and calling in to our Assistance all those Motives and Arguments to Virtue and Holiness, that the Religion of
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our Lord will furnish us with; and by frequently and heartily devoting ourselves to the Service of our Master Christ, and earnestly imploring his continual Assistance, and Direction, and Support in all our Undertakings. Now, if we do thus take Care to provide ourselves against the Offences that may happen, we need not be troubled or frightened when they come; for to a Man thus armed and fortified, they will do no Harm, but a great deal of Good, (as I said before) of what Nature or Kind soever they be. If we do our Parts towards securing our Innocency, God undoubtedly will not fail to do his; and as terrible and dangerous a Place as the World is, upon Account of the Multitude of Scandals that are therein, we shall have a safe and prosperous, tho' not always an easy Passage thro' it. Let us therefore be of good Comfort under whatever Trials and Temptations God in his Providence may think fit to expose us to. If we do not forsake ourselves, he will never forsake us; we have his Word for it, that *he will never suffer us to be tempted above what we are able;* ^{1 Cor. 10. 13.} and, if ever he suffers a great and an unusual Temptation to come upon us, why, in that Case, *he will, with the Temptation, also make a Way to escape, that we may be able to bear it.*

3. The last Thing observeable in my Text, is, the heinous Guilt and Punishment of those who are the Authors of Scandals and

Offences. *Woe be to that Man, &c.* What a terrible Woe this is, and what a dreadful Punishment it doth involve in it, appears from what our Lord had said in the Verse before. *Verily I say unto you, &c. it were better for that Man, than a Millstone were hanged about his Neck, and that he were drowned in the Depth of the Sea.* The Meaning of which is, he who shall, either by Word or Action, discourage the very meanest of Christ's Disciples from going on in the Christian Profession and Practice; shall tempt him, or seduce him from his Duty, and draw him into Sin, it is better for that Man that he should be hurled to the Bottom of the Sea, never to rise again. What a lively emphatical Description have we here of the dismal Condition of all those, by whose Means Scandals and Offences come! And it is observable, that this is declared concerning such a Man *as shall offend any one, even of the meanest and weakest of all those who profess the Christian Religion;* and if so, how unexpressibly great is their Guilt, and how sad shall be their Punishment, who have not only offended one, but many hundreds, by debauching their Principles or Morals; by being Advisers, or Tempters, or Occasions to them of Sin, always supposing, unless they do timely repent of this their Wickedness, and make it their Business from henceforward to live entirely to God, and to endeavour as much the promoting the Interests of
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of Virtue and Religion, as they did before of Sin and the Devil.

The Use that I make of this Point is, that all of us, as we love our Souls, would have a Care of being the Authors of Offences, or of setting Temptations before others, of sinning against God. Let us have a Care of having any Hand in the Sins of others, either by advising them, or encouraging them; let us have a Care in all our Conversation of tempting or enticing any one in any Way, to do that which he ought not to do, as, God knows, this is a Fault too common in most Companies, especially in the Business of drinking; and I might name other Instances. Let us have a Care never to say or do any thing, that may discourage any Man in the Practice of that which is good; that we do not set an ill Example before those we converse with, and by that Means lay a Stumbling-block in their Way, to make them go and do likewise. This Case doth highly concern all of us, in whatever Circumstances we are in; but it doth more especially concern those, who are placed in any publick Office or Station, such as Magistrates; or in any Degree of Eminence above others, as the Nobility and Gentry among us. The Influence of the Lives and Actions of all these sort of Persons do extend to a great many; and the Encouragement they give to Looseness and Immorality, either by their Countenance, or by their Example,

is of infinite evil Consequence to all about them, nay, to the whole Nation; for they are the Patterns which meaner People propose to themselves to frame their Lives by; and if any sort of Vice or Sin be fashionable among them, it will of Necessity, by Degrees, get Reputation among the Multitude; and therefore they, above all others, are concerned in this Point, of not giving Offence; to take Care, both of their Practice and of their Principles; for if either of these be naught, the Scandals that will ensue thereupon are certain and inevitable.

And this give me Leave to say, and I conclude with it, that until the Men of Quality among us, they who have Estates and Fortunes, they who have Dignity and Authority, do seriously set themselves to live sober, and strict, and religious Lives, to shew an Esteem and Veneration to God and his Service, to discourage Vice and Profaneness, and to countenance Virtue and Goodness in all about them, by setting Examples of Temperance, Chastity and Devotion, there is little Hope that our Nation will ever be recovered from that Deluge of Atheism and Irreligion, and universal Corruption of Manners which have overspread it, and which all sensible Men too sadly and justly complain of.



SERMON V.

*The Duty and Advantages of publick
Fasting in general.*

Preached before Queen *Anne*, 1703-4.

JONAH iii. 5.

*The people of Nineveh believed God, and
proclaimed a Fast.*



WE have in this short Prophecy, one of the most wonderful and remarkable Relations that is almost to be met with in any History. God, it seems, was highly *displeased with the Wickedness of the People of Nineveh*, which at that time was one of the greatest Cities in the World, and the Capital of the *Assyrian* Empire. And thereupon he orders *Jonah*, one of the Prophets among the *Jews*, (within the Compass of which Nation his Prophets and his

his Church was then contained) to go and preach to them, and to tell them peremptorily, that within a very little while their whole City should be destroy'd. *Jonah*, whether he thought his Message would not be believed, or whether he thought that God, upon the *Ninevites* Repentance, might alter his Purpose, and so he should appear a false Prophet; or whether he looked upon this sending of him to a heathen People to be an ill Omen to his own Nation, the *Jews*, of God's casting them off, and taking the *Gentiles* into their Place: *Jonah*, I say, was very unwilling to undertake this Employment, and did all that ever he could to decline it. Accordingly, instead of going to *Nineveh*, as God had directed him, he took shipping for *Tarshish*. But this would not do; God Almighty found him out, and sent such a Storm upon the Sea, that there was no way left of saving the Ship, wherein he was, from Wreck, but by casting him into the Sea: Which being once done, the Tempest ceased, and there was a great Calm. As for *Jonah*, God provided a Whale to receive him after he was cast into the Deep, and after three Days to expose him again upon the dry Land.

This Judgment upon *Jonah*, and his miraculous Preservation after it, as it render'd the Mind of the Prophet pliable and obedient to God's Will, so did it prove, in all Probability, his Letter of Credence from God

God to the *Ninevites*. For after this to *Nineveh* *Jonah comes*; and there, as God ^{Ch. 3. v. 3.} had order'd him, he denounceth God's Judgments against them, positively declaring, *that within forty days Nineveh should* ^{v. 4.} *be destroyed*. One would wonder that so strange a Message should meet with any Belief in a Pagan City, especially, as far as we can gather from the Story, there being then no Appearance of any immediate Danger that could give them Apprehensions of such a sudden Destruction. But God never sends an Embassy to Mankind but he some way or other takes care to give Testimony to the Ambassador. Either *Jonah* wrought some extraordinary Works to evidence the Truth of his Mission from God, or (as it is very likely) several of those Merchants who had been Witnesses of the whole strange Adventure that had befallen him, were there upon the Spot to attest it, and so gain Credit to his Preaching. However, the Event that his Preaching had was remarkable, and what was then done by the King of *Nineveh* and his People, upon the preaching of *Jonah*, ought to be a Pattern to all succeeding Generations to follow whenever they are alarm'd by the approaching Judgments of God.

No sooner had *Jonah* preached that *Nineveh* should be destroy'd, but *the People of Nineveh believed God and proclaimed a Fast*. Or, as it is expressed in the following Verses,

v. 7. ses, a Day of Fasting and Humiliation was
 proclaimed throughout Nineveh by Order of
 the King and his Nobles. And the Solemnity of this Fast was extraordinary, for the
 v. 6. King rose from his Throne, and laid aside his Robes of State, and covered himself with
 v. 5. Sackcloth; and the People also, from the greatest to the least, put on Sackcloth, that being the Manner of expressing Sorrow and Humiliation among the Eastern Nations. But this was not all. Not only the King and the People kept a Fast, but they made their Beasts, their Flocks, and their Herds to do so likewise. For thus the Proclamation ran; *Let neither Man nor Beast, Herd nor Flock, taste any thing; let them not feed nor drink Water.* The Tasting here refers to the Man. The feeding and drinking Water to the Cattle. This way of keeping Fast may seem strange to us, but it was not so to the Pagan Nations. For *Virgil*, when he describes the solemn Mourning that was upon the Death of *Julius Caesar*, tells us, that on that Day the Oxen were not fed, nor any of the Cattle driven to water. And indeed this Circumstance, if it be well considered, will not appear so extravagant or unreasonable in a publick Mourning, as at first may be imagined. For it doth in some Degree contribute to the great Solemnity of it: And likewise it is in its own Nature apt to excite Men the more to afflict themselves. However, it is a
 v. 7. very

very good Expression of their Carelessness and Unconcernedness about all their worldly Matters, and their entire giving up themselves to Sorrow. But this by the by, for the giving some Light to this Passage of Scripture.

To proceed. This Fasting and Afflicting of their Bodies was not the only Expression of the *Ninevites* Repentance: They were by the Proclamation commanded *every Man to cry mightily to the Lord.* To v. 3. put up earnest Prayers to him, that he would pardon their Sins, and spare their City. And not only so, but which was the main thing of all, *to turn every Man from his evil Ways;* to forsake those Sins they were guilty of; especially that which was the crying notorious Sin of the City, which it seems by the Text was Injustice and Oppression. *Let every one turn from his evil v. 3. Way, and from the Violence that is in his Hand.* And this, as it follows, they faithfully put in Practice. What now was the Result of all this? What Benefit did the King of *Nineveh* receive by this their solemn Fasting and Prayer? Why they obtained all that they desired; for it is told us, that *God saw their Works, that they turned from their evil Way; and God repented of the Evil that he said he would do unto them, and he did it not.*

This is a brief Account of the Case of *Nineveh*, as it is here related by the Prophet.

phet. Two things we may gather from it, very proper to be insisted on *upon this Day*. On this Day, I say, wherein after the Example of the *Ninevites*, the whole People of this Land, by Proclamation of the Queen and her Nobles, are met together, *To humble our selves before Almighty God for our manifold Sins, and to supplicate his Divine Majesty for the Pardon of them, and the Preservation of us from the Hands of our Enemies, by protecting her Majesty, and giving happy Success to her Arms both by Sea and Land.*

Two things, I say, we may gather from this Story.

First, Of how great Efficacy publick Fasting and Prayer, when duly performed, are, for the averting publick Judgments, and the procuring publick Blessings.

Secondly, What is required to a due Performance of publick Fasting and Prayer, so that they may prove thus effectual. I begin with

I. The Efficacy of Publick Fasting and Prayer, when duly performed, for the averting publick Judgments and obtaining publick Blessings. We cannot deny our Assent to this, if we believe the Story of the *Ninevites*, which I have now given an Account of.

Ser. 5. *Advantages of Fasting.*

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of. And we can no more doubt of the Truth of that Story, than we doubt of the Truth of what our Saviour himself hath delivered. For he on solemn Occasions has confirmed the main Parts of that Story, by giving Testimony both of *Jonah's being three Days and three Nights in the Whale's Belly*, and likewise to the Repen-^{Matt. 12, 40, & 41.} tance of the Ninevites upon his preaching to them. But there are other as illustrious Proofs to be met with in Scripture of the Efficacy of Fasting and Prayer, for those Purposes, as is this Instance of the Ninevites. When the *Moabites* and *Amorites*^{2 Chron. c. 20. v. 1.} and other neighbouring Nations were gathered together in a great Army against *Judah*, and the King and all the Nation were in a very great Consternation, by reason of the Danger that thereby threatened them, what Course do they take to obtain Deliverance of God from those very Enemies? Why it is told us in the Chapter that was read this Morning, That *Je-*^{2 Chron. 20. v. 3.} *koshaphat* the King was afraid, and set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a Fast throughout all *Judah*. And *Judah* gather-^{v. 4.} ed themselves together to ask Help of the Lord; even out of all the Cities of *Judah* they came to seek the Lord. And the Success of their Fasting and Prayer was answerable to their Expectation. For God was intreated hereby, and wrought that Day^{v. 22, 23, &c.} a great Deliverance for his People, destroy-
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ing all their Enemies, and that without any fighting on their parts, by setting them one against another.

Thus also when the *Jews* were carried captive into *Babylon*, what other Means did they use for their Delivery out of that Bondage, but those we are speaking of: A publick solemn Fast, and Prayer to God.

Ezra 8. 21. *Thus it is told us, That a solemn Fast was proclaimed, that they might afflict themselves before the Lord their God, to seek of him a right way for them, and for their little ones, and for their Substance. And then it follows, That they fasted and besought God for this, and he was intreated of them.*

v. 23.

Thus again when the whole Nation of the *Jews* was in danger to be utterly destroyed, by the cruel Orders that *Abasuerus* the King had sent forth, that on a certain Day they should be massacred, Man, Woman, and Child, throughout his Dominions; the Remedy which they apply to in this Extremity, was still Fasting and Prayer. In every Province wheresoever the

Esther, c. 3. v. 13. *King's Commandment and his Decree came, there was a great Mourning among the Jews, and Fasting and Weeping; and many lay in Sackcloth and Ashes. And God had Regard to this their Fasting and Humiliation, and raised up Queen Esther to save them from Destruction; she likewise having first prepared herself for this Work, by solemn Fasting and Prayer.*

e. 4. v. 3.

Lastly,

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Lastly, To name no more Texts : This is the Method that God himself prescribed to his People for the preventing that Destruction that he had solemnly threatened them with by his Prophet Joel. Now, saith the Lord, turn ye even unto me, with all your Heart, with Fasting, and with Weeping, and with Mourning; and rent your Hearts, and not your Garments, and turn unto the Lord your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to Anger, and of great Kindness, and repenteth him of the Evil. Blow the Trumpet in Sion; sanctify a Fast; call a solemn Assembly; gather the People; assemble the Elders; gather the Children, and those that suck the Breasts; let the Bridegroom go forth of his Chamber, and the Bride out of her Closet: Let the Priests, the Ministers of the Lord, weep between the Porch and the Altar; and let them say, Spare thy People, O Lord, and give not thine Heritage to Reproach, that the Heathen should rule over them. Well, what Success were they to expect when they had done this? Why it follows, Then will the Lord be jealous for his Land, and will pity his People: Yea, the Lord will answer, and say unto his People, Behold, I will send you Corn, and Wine, and Oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith: and I will no more make you a Reproach among the Heathen; but I will remove far off from you the Northern Army, and so on.

Joel 2:
v. 12.

v. 13.

v. 15.

v. 16.

v. 17.

v. 18.

v. 19.

v. 20.

But this Doctrine of the Efficacy of Fasting and Prayer for the averting Publick Judgments will not go down with some among us. There are a Sort of Men that think very meanly of these Exercises, and all such like. They will not deny but there may be some Policy in setting apart Days of Fasting and Prayer in extraordinary Emergencies. But as for any real Benefit from God by such Appointment, notwithstanding all our Scripture-Stories, they believe nothing of it. May I have Leave to propose and examine a little what they have to say for this their Opinion.

Some of them go upon the Hypothesis of God's Decrees. If, say they, God governs the World, it is certain every thing comes to pass by his Order and Decrees. And can we be so foolish as to think that we can make him alter his Counsels or change his Methods of acting by our Fasting or Prayers, or any thing that we can do? But to this I answer; If this be a Difficulty, sure it is no very great one; for the *Ninevites* in my Text easily got over it: And yet in their Case they had a fairer Colour to make this Objection against their Fasting and Prayer than any of us can possibly have. God, as you have heard, sent his Prophet to them, to deliver to them a short, but very peremptory Message, *that within forty Days Nineveh should be destroyed.* This the Prophet told them, and this

this *they believed*. According to these Mens Reasoning now, how could they hope, by any Act or Endeavour of theirs, to reverse the Decrees of God? Either God resolved to destroy their City, or he did not. If he did not, *Jonah* was a false Prophet, and they might, for all his Preaching, have securely continued in that Course they had hitherto followed. If God did really resolve to do as he had said, his Will and Counsel being unchangeable, must stand firm; nor can any human Creature, by any thing he can do, either resist it or alter it. To what Purpose therefore should they use Endeavours! But the *Ninevites* did not reason thus, but argued after another manner. *Who can tell, say they, but God will turn* c. 3. v. 9. *and repent, and turn away from his fierce Anger, that we perish not.* They believed God's Decree to be conditional. If they turned from their evil Ways, they thought God would turn from his fierce Indignation. If they changed their Manners, God would change his Purpose: And therefore doing what was in their Power, they promised to themselves good Success; and the Event shewed that in this Matter they reasoned very truly.

Well, but this Answer does not satisfy. The *Ninevites* might reason as they pleased; but every one who knows any thing of God, knows that he is in his Nature unchangeable, (Immutability being one of his

essential Attributes.) And this the Scripture declares over and over again, telling us, that *with him there is no Variableness, nor Shadow of turning*; and that the *Strength of Israel* as he cannot lie, so neither can he repent, for he is not a Man that he should repent. But now to suppose that upon our Fasting and Prayer God grants some things to us, or confers some Benefits upon us, which without that Fasting and Prayer he would not have done, is in effect to say, that our Fasting and Prayers can produce a Change, an Alteration in the Mind and Counsel of God; and then, what is become of his Immutability? But in truth, this, tho' it looks like an Argument, is but a mere Fallacy. God's hearkening to, or being moved by our Prayers or other Endeavours, doth not in the least clash with the Unchangeableness of his Nature. It is true, when upon our Prayers, and Fasting and Repentance, God is pleased to give us those things we pray for, which without those Conditions he would not have done; it cannot be denied that here is a Change somewhere: But if the Matter be examined, it will be found to be in us, and not in God. God's Mind was always the same towards us; that is, He resolved, that if we humbly and heartily beg'd such and such Mercies and Blessings at his Hands, and did otherwise qualify ourselves for them, we should have them; but if we did

James 1.

17.

1 Sam. 15.

29.

did not, we should go without them. When therefore upon our Prayers we obtain that Deliverance, or that Blessing, which we had not before, it is not He that is changed, but we. We, by performing the Conditions he required of us, do look with another Aspect towards him, do intitle our selves to another kind of Dealing with us than we could claim before ; we have made our selves capable of receiving those Benefits, which before we were not.

And thus much of the first Objection against the Efficacy of Fasting and Prayer, for the obtaining Blessings from God. But there is another that is urged by another sort of Men, which ought not here to be passed by without considering it,

It is of those who hold the Necessity of all Events upon mechanical Principles. They believe the World to be a great Machine, and whatsoever comes to pass therein, is the Effect of those fixed and unalterable Laws of Motion which are established in it ; so that whatever happens among Mankind has a natural and a necessary Cause to produce it. And therefore however in common Speech we call those things that are grateful to us the Blessings of God, or if they be grievous to us, we call them the Punishments of God for our Sins, yet they do and must happen promiscuously and indifferently to the Good and to the Bad : And therefore to what purpose is it to fast

and to pray for the obtaining of good things, or removing of evil things from us, unless we can suppose that by these our Endeavours we can stop the Course of Nature, or God will stop it for our Sakes?

This is the Objection, and two things I have to say in answer to it. *First*, Tho' it should be granted that all outward Events owe their Production immediately to outward and necessary Causes, and that God does not interpose in the hindering or furthering of them, but leaves second Causes to work according to their Nature: Yet there is one whole kind of things, and those too, that either are or ought to be the greatest Matter of our Prayers, that the Objection does not at all reach to, *viz.* those which we call *spiritual things*; such are, not only the Pardon of our Sins, and the Favour of God, but all the Perfections and Accomplishments of our Minds, Wisdom, and Prudence, and Fortitude, and all the moral Virtues. These, I hope, cannot be called the Result of necessary outward Causes, but are the Effects of God's Grace, and our own Endeavours. These therefore, I hope, we may both reasonably, and with Assurance of Success, pray for, notwithstanding any thing said in the Objection to the contrary. And yet let me tell you, even the obtaining these things will go a great way not only to the bettering the Condition of private Persons, and deliver-

delivering them out of their evil Circumstances; but to the making any Nation or People great, and happy, and prosperous. For instance, if it should please God upon our hearty Repentance and fervent Prayers on this Day to pour out his Spirit upon all Orders and Degrees of Men among us, and make all her Majesty's Subjects in their several Stations sincerely good and virtuous; if it would please God to inspire all her publick and her private Counsels with true Wisdom and Unanimity, and a hearty Zeal for promoting the publick Good before any private Interests: If it should please him to inspire all her Officers and Soldiers with Courage, and Resolution, and Diligence; all her Ministers with Integrity and Uncorruptness; and all her People with the true Fear of God, and loyal Hearts to her Majesty, and sincere Love and Charity to one another: I would ask whether these very things alone, whatever Discouragements we might have from Storms and Tempest, and all other things that depend upon natural Causes, would not give us a glorious Prospect of happy Times, and put us into comfortable Hopes of having those Judgments averted which we are now afraid of, and of obtaining all those Blessings which on this Day we pray for. And yet all these things I have now mentioned are out of the Reach, as I said, of mechanical Causes. The Laws of Motion have nothing

to do with them ; but they are the pure Result of the Grace and Spirit of God, and of our own hearty Prayers and Endeavours.

But, *secondly*, As for those outward Events which come upon this World, that seem to depend upon such Principles as we have no Power over ; such as Health or Sickness, Peace or War, good or bad Weather, Plenty or Scarcity, Victory over our Enemies, or being overthrown by them, and the like : Tho' it be acknowledged that all these have natural Causes, yet they have not such natural Causes as are necessary. They come to us in a natural way, but do not come to us in such a necessary unavoidable way as the Objection supposeth. For here is the thing ; admitting that God Almighty in his Government of the World doth not usually step out into extraordinary Actions, beyond or above the Course of Nature, yet he has so contrived the Course of Nature that such Events as we speak of may be hindered or may be forwarded ; may come to pass, or may not come to pass ; may happen this way, or may happen another way, as Men behave themselves towards God, and as he sees best for them ; and this without any Violence done to Nature, or without transgressing the Laws of it. So that there is Room enough, abundantly enough left for our Endeavours and our Prayers ; and as we
use

use them, or use them not, the Success and the Event shall prove accordingly.

It is a great Mistake to think that the Affairs of this outward World are managed wholly by mechanical Powers, or, which is the same thing, by necessary Causes. No, the Wills and the Actions of Mankind have a mighty Influence upon them, as is visible in some of those things I mentioned, as Peace and War, Health and Sickness, Victory and Overthrow.— And no body, I hope, will say that the Actions of Men are necessary. But besides, the Angels and separate Spirits who are in a great Number every where, and are the invisible Ministers of God's Providence, have not only an Influence over the Actions of Mankind, by suggesting to their Minds a thousand things that perhaps they would otherwise never have thought of; but they have also a mighty Influence over those Powers of Nature that seem to act most necessarily: I mean the Elements, as we call them, from whose various Combinations arise Storms and Tempests, fruitful and barren Seasons, sickly or healthful Years: Both these Causes, I say, the free, as well as the necessary Agents of this World, those invisible Ministers of God do so dispose, and direct, and order, as that they shall produce such Events as God sees fittest for Mankind, whether it be by way of Judgment as a Punishment of their Sins, or by
way

way of Mercy, as a Testimony of God's Acceptance of them. And all this too comes to pass in a natural way, that is, it is the common and usual Method of God's Providence in the Government of the World. But then I add further, whenever there happens a just Occasion for God to exercise his extraordinary Power above or against the Course of Nature, he will not fail to do that likewise; and abundance of Instances of that in his Government of the World he hath given us, and, for any thing that I know, doth yet give us.

These things considered, we have no Reason to imagine that because things are commonly dispensed to us by the Ministry of second Causes, of which we can give some natural Account, that therefore God had no Hand in bringing such things to pass in the World, but that they come fortuitously or necessarily, and cannot be hindered or forwarded by the Prayers or Endeavours of Mankind: No, certainly; tho' the Effect, whatever it was, was immediately produced by second Causes, yet it was God, that, by the Ministers of his Providence, laid the Train of those things, and so ordered and managed them, as that righteous and good Ends should be served by the Effects that they produce. So that, as our blessed Saviour hath told us, not so much *as a Sparrow doth fall to the Ground*, but that

that it may be truly said, *it is by the Will of our heavenly Father.*

To conclude this Point therefore : Since all Events whatsoever do so absolutely depend upon the Will and Pleasure of God, it plainly follows, that it is so far from being needless or impertinent to have Recourse to solemn Humiliation, and Fasting and Prayer in the time of publick Danger, as the Objection would infer, that, on the contrary, the Use of these is indispensably necessary, if we would have our Affair, to prosper. These being the Means which both the Light of Nature hath directed Mankind to for that Purpose, and accordingly hath been always practised by all Nations who have had any Sense of God and his Providence, and the Means likewise which God himself has appointed, and to the Efficacy of which he has given many Testimonies in his holy Word, as I have already shew'd.

II. Having thus done with the first Head of my Discourse, I now proceed to the other, *viz.* What is required to the due Performance of publick Fasting and Prayer that so they may be effectual for the averting the Judgments of God, and obtaining his Blessing.

I have already read to you the Account that the Prophet has here given us concerning the Behaviour of the *Ninevites* upon this

c. 3. v. 5. this Occasion. He tells us, that *they believed God, and therefore they proclaimed a Fast.* That *they cried mightily unto the Lord,* and that *they turned every one from his evil Way, and from the Violence that was in his Hands.* So that if we take our Measures from the *Ninevites*, we must say that there are three things necessary to make our publick Fasting and Prayer effectual to the Ends they are designed for ;

First, That our Fasting do proceed from a truly religious Principle, that is to say, from a deep Sense of our Sins against God, and the Punishment we deserve for them.

Secondly, That our Prayers for his Mercy be very earnest and importunate ; that we *cry mightily unto the Lord,* as the *Ninevites* here did.

Thirdly, That our Fasting and Prayer be accompanied with serious Resolution to reform our Lives, *by turning from our evil Way.*

Give me leave to speak very briefly to these three Things.

1. First of all ; If we expect to have our solemn Fasting at this time effectual to the Ends it is designed for, it is necessary that

it do proceed from a truly religious Principle; that is to say, from a deep Sense of our Sins against God, and the Punishment we deserve for them. Fasting, as it is a bare Abstinence from Meat, signifies nothing in God's Account; nay, though we added Sackcloth and Ashes to it, no more than any other indifferent Action of human Life. That which gives it its Virtue, is the inward Humiliation of our Souls before God for our own Sins, and the Sins of the Nation; and the giving the best Expressions we can, by thus punishing and afflicting our Bodies, that we are truly grieved and afflicted for having offended God, and are deeply sensible of what we have deserved from Him upon that Account. We do hereby declare that we judge and sentence our selves, that we may prevent the Judgment of the Lord. This is the true Notion of religious Fasting. Without this, it is a Sacrifice without an Heart; nay, it is declared by God to be an Abomination to him. *Is this, says he, the Fast that I have chosen? A Day for a Man to afflict his Soul? Is it to bow down his Head like a Bull-rush, and spread Sackcloth and Ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a Fast and an acceptable Day unto the Lord? No; if the Fast go no further than this, it is so far from being acceptable, that he declares by the same Prophet, that it was Iniquity, and*

Isaiah 58.
v. 5.
C. I. V. 13.
the

the solemn Meeting of this kind, his Soul could not away with.

It would be well if all of us here present, who pretend this Day to keep a solemn Fast to the Lord, would a little examine our selves upon this Point. Do we really come with those Qualifications which are required to make a Fast a true Act of Religion, and such as will gain God's Acceptance? Do not some of us fast merely for fasting sake, being no more concerned what the State of their Souls is towards God, than if they were going to a Feast? Do not some of us appear here without any inward Sense in the least either of their Sins, or of the Judgments of God, which hang over our Heads, designing more by this their Fasting to shew Respect to the Queen and her Proclamation, than to take any Occasion therefrom to examine their own Lives, and to lay their Sins to heart, and seriously to repent of them for their own, and the Nation's Sake? If there be any here whose Conscience cannot answer them that they come with better Designs and Dispositions, they might as well forbear their Fasting at this time; for it is certain the Publick is likely to receive little Benefit from it. If we would observe a Fast to any Purpose, it is fit that we come to it with a great Zeal and Concernment for the Nation of which we are Members,
and

and also with a hearty Sorrow for our Sins, and a just Apprehension of the Wrath and Displeasure of God, that we have incurred by them. If we have any Concernment for our Country, it will shew itself that way. We shall not only be sensible of our own Transgressions, and the personal Guilt we have thereby contracted, but of the Sins and the Guilt in which we and the whole Kingdom lie involved. We shall sadly consider how we have abused God's Mercies, and how we have defeated the Ends of his Judgments. What ungrateful Returns we have made for all his Kindnesses, and how we have multiplied our Transgressions against Heaven with an high hand. And we shall not easily *speake* ^{Ezek. 13. 10.} *Peace to our selves when there is no Peace,* but being apprehensive of what our Sins have deserved, we shall stand in continual Fear, lest God should visit them upon us. And certainly we of this Nation have great Reasons for that Fear; not but that I hope, as bad as we are, we may be as good as some of the other Nations, that we have now to deal with. Tho' whether this be true or no, God Almighty only knows, who alone *searcheth the Heart*, and when the Iniquities of a People are at the height, knows how, or in what manner to visit them. But. I say, considering how long God hath spared us, and how long we have enjoyed

enjoyed the Blessings of Peace at home, and all manner of Plenty and Prosperity (tho' perhaps with many Fears and just Apprehensions of Danger) when most of our Neighbours have *tasted the Cup of God's Fury*, groaning under the Cruelties and Miseries of Wars, and Persecutions, and Desolations; and considering the great Privileges and Advantages we have for many Years enjoyed of a glorious Light of the Gospel, and all the outward Means of Grace that could be desired for the eternal Salvation of our Souls, and that above any Nation under Heaven; and withal how unprofitable we have been under those Means, and what little Effect they have had upon us for the bettering our Manners or reforming us to a sober Christian Conversation: And considering, lastly, how very wicked a great many of us are; what a World of open and gross Sins and Impieties do reign among us; what a lewd, and profane, and atheistical Spirit seems to have gone out among us, and to prevail upon us; what a deal of Hypocrisy is every where to be met with, Men making a mighty Noise with Religion, and being zealous, even to Bigottry, for that Mode of it which they have taken up, and yet not having one Drachm of inward Sense of that which it obligeth them to; it being Merit enough to sanctify all their other
 Actions

Actions be they never so unchristian, if they can but with the Jews cry aloud, *The Temple of the Lord, &c.* Jer. 7. 4. I say, considering these things, is there not Reason enough to be apprehensive of God's Judgments? and to fear, lest he should decree upon us what he once said by his Prophet, *Shall I Jer. 5. 9. not be avenged of such a Nation as this?* At least is there not Reason enough for us all on this Day to prostrate our selves in the greatest Humility before God, heartily bewailing our own Sins and the Sins of our Country? and earnestly begging of God, with devout Prayers and Tears, that *he would be merciful unto us; that he would not deal with us according to our Deserts; but that he would spare our Nation, and neither give us up to be ruined by our own intestine Divisions, nor deliver us over as a Prey to our Enemies?*

2. And that leads me to the second thing which is required to the due Performance of a solemn Fast and Humiliation, *viz.* Fervent and importunate Application to the Throne of Grace for the averting those Judgments we have Reason to fear, and bestowing those Blessings upon us we stand in need of. Indeed if we be so truly sensible of our Sins and of our Danger as we ought to be, it will necessarily put us upon earnest Prayers and Supplications to God Almighty: That he would be pleased to

pardon those Sins for which we humble our selves before him, and stop those Punishments we are conscious they have deserved. This was one Article of the Proclamation that was made in *Nineveh* for the publick
 c. 3. v. 8. Fast, viz. *That every one should cry mightily unto the Lord.* And great Reason there is for so doing; for hereby we do most properly acknowledge God to be the Lord and Governor of the World; and that he is the Disposer of all Events that happen to us, and that we do not trust in our selves, nor in our own Powers, nor in the Strength of our Allies, nor in any Arm of Flesh, but that we wholly depend upon him for all the Good we hope for.

Let us all therefore, on this Day, devoutly throw our selves at the Footstool of God, and most earnestly supplicate his Divine Majesty, that he would be merciful to us, and our Country; that he would pardon our Sins, and turn his Anger from us. Let every one of us this Day take up the Priest's Office, and say the Words of the
 Joel 2. 17. Prophet— *Spare thy People, O Lord, and give not thine Heritage to Reproach, that the Heathen should rule over them: Wherefore should they say among the Heathen, Where is their God?* Let us pray heartily that God
 Luke 19. 42. would, in this our Day, give us a true Understanding of the things that belong to our Peace: That he would incline the Heart of every
 every

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every one in this Kingdom to love and hold fast the true Religion, and to live according to it: That he would heal all our Breaches, and put a Stop to our unaccountable Divisions which above all other things do threaten the publick Peace and Safety: That he would bless and preserve the Queen, and direct all her Counsels, and inspire all who under her have the Management of the publick Affairs, with such true Wisdom, and Piety, and Zeal, for the common Good, that, laying aside all private Interests and Applications, all their Aims may be directed to the promoting the Glory of God, and the Peace and Tranquillity of the Kingdom. That he would command the Winds and the Seas that they do us no further Mischief. That he would give a Blessing to the Undertakings of Her Majesty's Forces, and those of her Allies. And lastly, that he would grant us a happy Peace, that *we being delivered from the Hands of our Enemies, may serve him without Fear, in Holiness and Righteousness before him all the Days of our Life.* Luke 1. 74, 75.

All these things we may and we ought to pray for, and to pray for them heartily, and earnestly, and importunately. And tho' we cannot positively assure our selves that every Particular of them shall be granted upon our Prayers, because perhaps God sees that we of this Nation are not quali-

fied for all these Blessings; the greater Number of us putting a Stop to the Efficacy of the publick Prayers for those things, by their obstinate Resolution to continue in their wicked Practices, and Affronts to God Almighty; and because perhaps God sees that it is better for us to be exercised with Difficulties at Home, and with Dangers from Abroad, for the Trial of all Sorts of Men among us; yet this we may depend upon, that our hearty Prayers to God for those things will not be in vain: They will have such Success, if they be affectionate and hearty, as that the Nation will be much the better for them; but to be sure they who put them up, will find their Account in them. And no doubt but we shall have the good Effect of our Prayers, if

3. In the third and last Place, they be accompanied with serious Resolutions to reform our Lives, and to turn from our evil Ways. This is the third thing required to the due Performance of publick Fasting and Prayer. And indeed it is the main thing of all. This was that which God especially took notice of in the Fast of the *Ninevites*, and for which he reversed his Sentence of destroying their City. The

6. 3. v. 10. Text tells us that *God saw that they turned from their evil Way, and therefore he repented of the Evil that he said he would do unto them; and he did it not.* Their turning
ing

ing from their evil Way here mentioned, is, I conceive, to be understood of their solemn Resolutions and Purposes to turn from them ; of the Reality of which they might at that time give some Instances and Expressions. But of the Fruits of those Resolutions and Purposes, and how they afterwards practised, *Jonah* the Prophet stay-
ed not long enough to be a Witness of: And for that Reason it is that I say here, that our solemn Fasting and Prayer ought to be accompanied with a *serious Resolution* to forsake our Sins, without mentioning the actual forsaking of them. Indeed, I take it, that this is sufficient to obtain God's Acceptance of our Fasting and Prayers. And truly more than this we cannot do at any single time, and yet less than this, it will be an Affront to God to offer to him. All our Fasting and Prayers will signify nothing without a real Intention to forsake the Sins we fast for, and to live such a Life as to make us worthy of the Blessings we pray for. *If I incline to Wickedness in my Heart*, says the Psalmist, *the Lord will not hear me.* *We* John 9. 31 know, saith the Man in the Gospel, *that God heareth not Sinners.* Nay, God doth not only not hear Sinners, but their Prayers are an Abomination to him. *The Sacrifice of the Wicked*, says Solomon, *are an Abomination to the Lord.* Prov. 15. 3.

But what then, are not wicked Men to fast with us, and to pray with us? Yes, certainly. How else should they ever come to be good? But they must leave off their Wickedness, or if that cannot be done at once, or in a Moment, they must at least sincerely purpose and resolve against it, and then put up their Prayers to God. If they do not do this, they affront God. Instead of praying to him, they defy him, and put a Mockery upon him. For is it not a plain Mockery? Is it not a Defiance of God's Justice and Holiness, to come, for Instance, to humble my self before God for the Sins of the Nation, and to pretend seriously to beg Pardon for my own personal Sins, my Whoredoms, my Adulteries, my Extortions, and Oppressions, my Drunkenness and Debaucheries, my Hypocrisy in pretending a Zeal for Religion, when yet I neither believe or practise any thing of it; and yet, at the same time, I know in my own Heart that I mean not to forsake one of those Sins, but to take the next Occasion that offers it self to commit them over again? Till therefore we can seriously resolve to quit our evil Courses, to forsake every known wilful open Sin, which we are conscious to our selves that we live in, let us not think our selves qualified to join in any publick Fast, or to put up our Prayers to God, either for our selves or for the Nation.—The Sum of all that I have said upon this Head is elegantly expressed by

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by the Prophet *Isaiab*, Part of whose Words I have already quoted, and shall now conclude with the rest. *This is the Fast that I have chosen, to loose the Bands of Wickedness,* &c. c. 58. v. 6, 7, 8, 9.

God Almighty give us Grace thus to fast, and thus to pray, that so we and our Country may have the Benefit of it in this World, and that it may be a Means of promoting our eternal Salvation in the other.



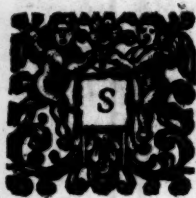


SERMON VI.

*The several Causes of Mens Mistakes
about the Terms of their Salvation,
and the Reasons why they deceive
themselves into vain Opinions of
their own Security.*

I JOHN III. 7.

*Little Children, let no Man deceive you. He
that doth Righteousness is righteous, even
as he is righteous.*



T. John's Design in these Words,
and in the greatest Part of this
Chapter, is to convince those to
whom he writes, of the absolute
Necessity there is of living a pure
and holy Life, if ever they mean to go to
Heaven. And this in Opposition to those
Gnostick Principles that went about in those
Days, which pretended to reconcile Chri-
stianity with immoral Practices. To this
End he tells them in the third verse, that
whoso-

whoſoever bath the Hope in him of being happy with Chriſt, at his ſecond Appearance, muſt purify himſelf even as He is pure. In the ſixth verſe he tells them, that it is in vain to call themſelves Chriſt's Diſciples, if they indulge themſelves in any Sin, for *whoſoever abideth in Chriſt, ſinneth not: And whoſoever ſinneth, (that is, lives in any Courſe of Sin) bath not ſeen Chriſt, nor known him,* how much ſoever he pretends to the Knowledge of him. In my Text, which is the next Verſe, he goes on to the ſame Purpoſe, *Little Children, &c.* that is to ſay, he only ſhall be accounted righteous before God, who practiſeth Righteouſneſs in all his Converſation; who is righteous in the ſame Manner (tho' not in the ſame Degree) as Chriſt was. And, laſtly, in the tenth verſe, *In this,* ſays he, *the Children of God are manifeſt, and the Children of the Devil: Whoſoever doth not Righteouſneſs is not of God.* All this is to ſhew how inſeparable true Holineſs is from true Chriſtianity, and how indiſpenſably neceſſary it is that they who would live happily in the other World, ſhould *live righteouſly, and ſoberly, and godly* in this.

But that which I at this time take notice of, and mean to inſiſt upon, is that Preface with which St. *John* introduceth his Propoſition in my Text. *Little Children, Let no Man deceive you.* If you ask what I gather from hence; I anſwer thus, This Caution of

of his, seems to imply, that altho' of all the Deceits in the World those which are about the Terms of our Salvation be the most dangerous, yet nevertheless this is a Matter wherein People are wonderfully apt to be deceived. Mankind are strangely prone to find out ways to cheat themselves and others into a Belief that they may appear *righteous* in God's Account, tho' they are not *righteous as Christ is*, and consequently that they may go to Heaven at last, tho' they continue in their Sins all their Days: And therefore there is very great need that they should be often put in mind of, and often warned against these Deceits. This I say is that which seems to be intimated in this Preface or Caution of the Apostle.

I am the more ready to draw this Inference from this Passage, because I observe, that when St. Paul in his Writings has Occasion to treat of this Argument, he is wont to give the same Caution, and in the same Language; *Know ye not that the Unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God? Be not deceived: Neither Fornicators nor Adulterers, nor, &c. shall inherit the Kingdom of God.* Again. *This ye know, that no Whoremonger, &c. hath any Inheritance in the Kingdom of God and of Christ. Let no Man deceive you with vain Words. Lastly, Be not deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a Man soweth, that shall he also reap. If a Man sow to the Flesh, he shall of the Flesh reap*
 Corrup-

1 Cor. 6.
9, 10.

Eph. 5.
5, 6.

Gal. 6. 7,
8.

Corruption: but if he sow to the Spirit, he shall of the Spirit reap Life everlasting. What now can be the Meaning of all these Cautions, *not to be deceived*, unless the Apostles did apprehend that People were very apt to be imposed upon in this Matter, and to take up Notions and Fancies that they might go to Heaven without living a virtuous and holy Life.

But in truth the Matter of Fact doth sufficiently speak it self, and there is no need to have Recourse to the Authority of the Apostles for the Proof of it. As Christ's Religion goes in the World, God knows, too many of all Persuasions, and in all Communions, are not only in Danger of being led away, but are actually led away with this Deceit that we are cautioned against. To go no further than our own Country, in which we have Reason to hope there are as many sincere good Christians as in any Part of *Europe* of the same Dimensions; yet, what a great Number we have of those who profess Christ's Religion among us, who are so far from living up to that Holiness and Virtue, that our Lord has required of his Disciples, that we may truly say their Lives are a Scandal to the Gospel of Christ! And yet of this great Number of Professors who live thus viciously, and, as I may say, in Contradiction to their Religion, yet there are not many, or rather very few of them, but hope to go to Heaven,

ven. Not one of a thousand in any Communion thinks himself a Reprobate, or that he shall perish everlastingly. But they generally believe that they shall do well enough in the other World. Something or other they have wherewith to bear up their Spirits against all the Fears of Damnation, and to encourage them to hope for Heaven, tho' they cannot but, at the same time, acknowledge, that their Lives and Conversations are inconsistent with the Religion they profess.

What now must we say of all these? Are they not perfectly under the Delusion we are speaking of? Is it not plain they hope to be righteous in God's Account, without doing Righteousness; and that they hope to be saved by some other Way than by living a holy Life? Certain it is. And therefore great Reason is there that People should be often called upon, should have often this Caution of the Apostle's pressed upon them; *Little Children, Let no Man deceive you.*

Heb. 12.
14.

But it may justly be wonder'd at since God hath so positively declared himself in his Revelation to Mankind by Jesus Christ, *That without true Holiness no Man is to expect future Happiness*, how it comes to pass that Christians generally, Christians of all Communions, are so very apt to hope for Salvation without Holiness; nay, how is it possible for them, considering

ing the plain Declarations of the Gospel, to imagine that any thing short of sincere Virtue should carry them to Heaven. To give some Answer to this Enquiry is what I design now to do.

And here I shall lay before you some of the principal things which I take to be the Grounds and Occasions of Mens Deceits in this Matter, hoping that the exposing of them may be of some use for the preventing such Deceits.

1. And the first thing that occurs to me among the several Causes of Mens Mistakes about the Terms of their Salvation, is, our being apt to measure the Nature of God and his Proceedings with us by those Rules by which we are wont to govern our selves in Cases where we are concern'd. I grant, indeed, in all Cases where we proceed according to the Rules of right Reason, we may justly conclude, that God will so proceed with us in the like Cases. But now, in this low degenerate State we are in in this World, we have got God knows how many false Principles, which as they are apt to influence us in our making a Judgment upon our selves and our Dealings with others, so are we apt, upon their Account, to fancy that all God's Dealings with us must be suitable thereunto.

I will give two or three Instances of this. In the first Place we in our natural Tempers are not much inclined to be hard or severe

severe upon any Man, except in a Case where we our selves have received Injury from him. This now leads us to fancy, that since God receives no real Injury from any Man's Sins, therefore he will not be much concern'd in the Punishment of them, and we may hope to be everlastingly happy hereafter, tho' we be not holy and virtuous in this Life. For thus we reason: I, that am far less pitiful than God is, cannot find in my Heart to make any Person miserable (if it was in my Power to do it) that hath never injured me, tho' he have otherwise behaved himself very foolishly and very wickedly: How then can I imagine that the infinitely kind and good God will give any Man over to Destruction, tho' he may have been very wicked in some respects, considering that God hath suffered no Injury by him. For all the Sins and Wickedness in the World doth not in the least touch God Almighty, that is, he receives no Damage from them. His infinite Glory and Happiness is as perfect and undisturbed as if none of them had ever happened. How therefore can he concern himself so severely to punish them, as the Preachers talk in their Pulpits? — But now it will be enough to expose the Falseness and Vanity of this sort of Reasoning to consider, that God in his Dealings with Mankind is not to be looked upon as a Party, but as a Governor, and as a Judge.

It

It is true, God suffers nothing by all the Wickednesses and Villainies of Men or Devils, were they ten thousand times greater than they are. But yet it concerns his Justice, as he is supreme Ruler and Governor of the World, to make a Discrimination between Good and Evil: To reward all those who sincerely endeavour to observe his Laws, (which are all for the Good of Mankind) and, on the other side, to punish all those who wilfully and impenitently transgress them. For if God did not do this, how could he approve himself to be that King and Governor of Mankind, that righteous Judge of all the Earth, which he hath declared himself to be. Sure I am, this cannot be denied to be good Reasoning, if we put the Case as to earthly Rulers or Magistrates. Suppose a civil Magistrate should have a Criminal brought before him, accused, for Instance, of Murder, Burglary, or the like, and the Fact is proved, would you not have him in that Case to pronounce the Sentence that the Law has awarded to all such Malefactors? Certainly you must think it infinitely reasonable he should, tho' yet he is no more injured or affronted with what the Malefactor hath done, than you are injured when the Story is told you.

Thus again, to give another Instance of our judging of God's Ways by our own: The Temper of Mankind, as it generally stands,

stands, is apt to be pleased with little things, and displeased with little things also. A little outward Respect or Civility from any Person, let him otherwise be a bad Man, has the Power to gain our Friendship, or at least to buy off our Displeasure against him, provided he hath done us no Harm. And, on the other side, a little thing, if it thwart our Interests and Inclinations, has the Power to disoblige us, and to make us angry with the Man that doth it, tho' otherwise he be a worthy honest Man. Now finding this to be our own Temper, we are apt to think that God Almighty must be of the same, and accordingly we most commonly represent him to our selves as one who is pleased with little things, and displeased with little things also. And from hence do proceed these two different Effects; that one sort of Men, who are of a timorous melancholy Temper, are always fancying that God is angry with them for every the least thing that seems to them to be irregular. And, on the other side, another sort of Men who are of a more sanguine Complexion, are apt to believe that any sort of Deference or outward Respect they pay to God's Commands, or the Commands of the Church for God's Sake, tho' it be but in small Instances, that this will atone for all other Sins whatsoever. But now both these sort of Persons are mightily mistaken; for God is not so easily displea-

displeased with every small Fault, especially when he sees that Fault proceeds from the Infirmary of our Nature, which we cannot help; nor is he at all to be bribed or brought into a good liking of us, by any outward Service, tho' it be never so much of his own Appointment, unless the whole Man be entirely devoted to him: Unless there be a thorough Conformity of a Man's Mind, and Will, and Actions, to those eternal and unchangeable Laws of Holiness and Virtue, which he hath prescribed us to walk by. For the effectual curing therefore of all Superstition in our Minds, (for I must confess I have no other Notion of Superstition, but that it is a fancying that God is pleased with little things, and displeased with little things likewise;) I say, for the removing this wicked Principle out of our Minds, let us always take care to represent God to our selves as a Being the most perfectly and immutably holy, and pure, and good, that is possible to be conceived. Let us frame such Ideas of him, as to believe that nothing in the Earth is so contradictory to his blessed Nature, as Folly and Sin; and that he never acts arbitrarily, but always loves and hates, rewards and punishes, according as the Object he has to deal with hath a Suitableness and Agreement with his holy Nature, or a Disagreeableness and Contrariety to it. And therefore certainly whatever is wicked or impure can never be acceptable to him, no outward

Advantages of Dress, no Cringes, no Compliments can render it lovely in his Eyes. On the other side, true and substantial Virtue and Goodness in the Mind, tho' attended with never so many Weaknesses and Failings, will for ever be his Delight, and will for ever be rewarded by him. And consequently it is in vain to hope the gaining of his Favour by any thing in the World that comes short of true Goodness, and they who have true Goodness, shall never need to fear the losing of his Favour, tho' otherwise their Performances be attended with many Imperfections.

To give one Instance more of our judging of God's Ways by our own Ways, and then I leave this Head. We are apt in our Tempers to have different Notions and Apprehensions of Things past and present, and from hence we are often led to believe that God will have so likewise; and this is another Ground of Mistake about the Conditions of our Salvation. To explain my self: When we have newly done a thing that our Conscience declares against as a great Sin, we are struck with a pungent Sense of the Wickedness of the Action, and we accuse ourselves most heinously for it, and are sufficiently sensible what we deserve at God's Hands for having thus notoriously broken his sacred Laws. But now this very Fact that was thus horrid in its Appearance, when it was first done, yet after some time, either

either all our first Impressions concerning it are worn away, and the thing is quite forgot; or, if it be remember'd, yet looking upon it as done long ago, we are not much concerned about it: And we are apt to believe that God hath such Apprehensions of the thing as we have. The stinging tormenting Remembrance of the Fact is gone from us, and so we too readily incline to believe that a very slight Remembrance of it remains with God likewise. Now by this means it is no difficult matter for a Man who hath not much used himself to Inspection, to bring a vast Number of Sins, and those aggravated with all odious Circumstances, into a very little Account: The greatest Part of them shall perhaps slip his Memory, and of those that he remembers, the heinous aggravating Circumstances are perhaps forgot. But if he should remember any thing of them, yet he cannot now look upon the Sins with a quarter of that Horror that he found in himself when he newly committed them, by which means here is a vast great Sum which a Man has to account for before God, dwindled in a manner into a Trifle. And sure God is of the same Mind too; and since a little Repentance will serve to satisfy a Man, why should it not satisfy God also? But now here is our Mistake: Though we be shallow Creatures, and easily lose our Impressions of things, and easily forget our past

Actions, yet God falls not under these Imputations of Weakness. All things are present to him alike at all times: And he has the same Sense of Mens Actions, and the same Resentments against them (if they were bad) an hundred Years after they were done, that he had the very Moment they were done. They are neither forgotten, nor the Malignity of them lessened in his Account by any Tract of Time. The way therefore to keep our selves from being imposed upon by such Fancies, is this: Let us imagine that all the Sins of our Life (I speak not of the little daily Sins which every Man commits, but all those Sins) which we looked upon as heinous, and upon which our Conscience flew in our Faces when we had been guilty of them: I say, let us imagine all these Sins, together with all their aggravating Circumstances, and all the severe and bitter Reflections we at that time made thereupon; imagine, I say, all these to be at once present to our Minds, and to affect us in the same Proportion all together as every one of them did singly, *viz.* that all the Grief, and Anguish, and tormenting Reflections we felt in our selves upon account of any one of them should not now be lost, but bear a Part of that grievous Load they would lay upon us when we took them all together. What sort of Thoughts now should we in that Case have of our selves? Sure I am, the very best of us would not have much Comfort,
but

but the worse Sort of us must sink into Desperation. But this is our Comfort, God will be merciful to all upon their true Repentance, and will never remember against them their former Iniquities. Nay, and this I think I may say further, God will not deal more severely with the worst of us than we our selves should in our Conscience think we deserved, were all our Sins and Transgressions, with the true Circumstances of them, set in the same View and Order before us that they are in his eternal Mind. And thus much of the first Head, of Things which occasion our Mistakes and Deceits about this Matter of the Terms of our Salvation.

2. But in the second Place, another thing that is apt to make us less dread the Consequences of a wicked Life, and to encourage our Hopes of Heaven upon very easy Conditions, is the vast Number of Delinquents that God has to punish, if he will punish all who do not lead such Lives as the Gospel prescribes. For thus we reason; tho' my own Conscience tells me I am not so good as I ought to be, yet I have reason to believe that I am not worse than the Generality of those I converse with, and yet they hope to be happy hereafter, or if they be not, Lord, how few shall be saved! Sure God will not send to Hell such a prodigious Multitude of Souls, as he must be supposed to do, if he save none but the truly Virtuous and Religious: for at this Rate, Hell

will be very full, and Heaven will be extremely empty. To speak plainly now to this. If those People who reason in this Manner be honest and well-meaning Christians, and do in the main of their Lives endeavour to serve God, and to live righteously and soberly among their Neighbours, tho' yet their Lives are not so strict, or so devout, or so perfect, that they can satisfy themselves that they have attained to those Degrees of Piety and Virtue that the Gospel seems to require of them: I say, if this be their Condition, I would not willingly deprive them of the Comfort of this Reasoning of theirs: Not that there is any Force in their Argument, but because we have really Reason to hope well of these Men, and of such as they are. And I do believe there is a great Number of such in the World, Men who are honest and sincere in the main, and do endeavour to approve themselves to God, but are yet in a low and imperfect State of Virtue. Now as to these, I say, I would by no means discourage them, only desire them for God's Sake, and for their own Peace Sake, to take a little more Pains, and to break loose from that Weight which hangs upon them, those Sins which do now *so easily beset them*. This they may certainly do, if they will apply their Minds to it, and by what means they may make *their Calling and Election sure* to themselves, which at present is uncertain. But now ha-
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ving said this, I add further; for any Man that hath no Sense of Religion, or who lives in a stupid, sensual, or worldly Life, with little Regard to God or the Concernments of his Soul, or who obstinately perseveres in any Course of open Sin against his Conscience; for any such Man to reason after this Sort, or to make use of this Argument of the Multitude of Offenders for the comforting himself that he shall escape well enough, is one of the most impudent things that can be. For admit that the Number of such wicked People as he is, was as great as he supposeth it to be (as we hope it is not) yet shall the Number of Offenders affrighten the just Judge and Governor of the World from executing his righteous Laws upon them? It often indeed happens among Men, that the Multitude of Criminals is a Security to them from Punishment; for the Greatness of their Number may make it formidable to the Magistrate to grapple with them, and therefore for Reasons of State there is a Necessity of conniving at the most, and making Examples of a few. But is this any Reason for God Almighty to spare insolent Rebels? That God that made the World with his Breath, and can with the same Breath turn it into nothing? That God who receives no Profit or Advantage by our utmost Services, nor can suffer any Diminution of his infinite Glory and Blessedness, tho' we and all Mankind were utterly destroyed? I say, with

Mat. 8. 11,
12.

such a God as this, can it be urged as an Argument to have Pity on Offenders, to say that they are too many to be punished? It is rather a Blasphemy to name it. And then as for that Suggestion, that after this way of dealing with Mankind, Hell would indeed be full, but Heaven would be empty; let them not trouble themselves about that. It is to be hoped God has more good People in the World than they (who measure other Folks by themselves) are aware of. And thousands, and ten thousands, whom they never think of, *Shall at the last Day come from the East, and from the West, and from all the Quarters under Heaven, and sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the Kingdom of God, when these wicked Children of the Kingdom, who had so many Advantages above the rest of Mankind, shall be cast out.* Yet further, if we should admit the greatest Part of Mankind to be as bad as they would have them, to be Atheists, or Knaves, or Hypocrites; nay, if we should suppose all Mankind to be Devils incarnate, yet I could by no means yield, that for all this Hell would be near so full as Heaven. For how many soever the Devils and wicked Men be, there is no doubt in the World, but there are abundantly more (I was going to say infinitely more) happy and pure Spirits who never departed from God, and who now do, and ever shall inhabit those vast
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and glorious Mansions above, than the Number of that infernal Crew can amount to.

3. Another thing that leads us often into Deceits, by making us think better of our Condition than we ought to do, is our Aptness to measure our Actions, not by the intrinsic Goodness or Evilness that is in them, but by the popular Opinions that go about concerning them.

Thus for Instance, when we find that there are sundry Practices frequently and commonly used among Men, which tho' they are expressly against the Letter of God's Law, do not yet sound very ill among the Men of the World, nor is there any Mark of Infamy put upon them, we are apt to conclude from hence, that these Practices, tho' they be Sins in some Sort, yet so small they are, that we cannot doubt but they will be easily passed by when we come to make our Accounts with God. This, I say, is a great Temptation to indulge our selves in many Sins, and yet for all that to believe that all things are right with us. For who is there that is led by this Sort of Principles, that can think himself much concerned to avoid that Action which he sees every Day to be so inoffensively practised; nay, perhaps there is not only no Blemish, no Disreputation doth attend it, but among many it is thought allowable, and by some commendable.

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I must confess I do think it is this taking our Estimates of Virtue and Vice from the received Opinions of them we converse with, that does as much Mischief to Souls, by making them to presume on God's Mercy, while they continue in such Practices as are directly contrary to his Laws, as any other thing whatsoever. For Instance, what a world of Murders hath the Notion of Honour that obtains among us been the Occasion of, tho' yet it be the most mishapen unnatural Notion of Honour that can be. For if a wise Heathen was to be asked, which was the more honourable in a Gentleman, to pass by a trifling Injury, or to revenge it to Death; I dare say he would answer (I am sure *Socrates* and *Cicero* would so have answer'd) that it was below a Man of Honour to take notice of such Affronts as now prove the most mortal Quarrels of the most honourable Men among Christians. What is it that makes Lewdness and Drunkenness, and such other Debauches, so frequently practised among us, but only this, the Fashionableness of the Sins doth so blind our Judgments, that we think them excusable Frolicks, how severely soever God has declared against them. A Man would not be prevailed upon to swear, or to curse, or to talk profanely, and irreligiously in his common Conversation, but that the Sin is so ordinary, that he believes God will estimate the Guilt of it, not according to the Rigour
of

of his Laws, but according to the Vogue it hath obtained among Men. Tho' our Religion doth most strictly forbid Back-biting and speaking Evil of others, yet seeing this is the general Entertainment of most Conversations, one thinks it no great matter to stretch a Point of Duty as to this Business, and he hopes God will easily make Allowance for it. Thus apt are we to be swayed by the popular Opinions about good or evil Actions. But yet for all that, it is of infinitely dangerous Consequence; for whoever frames his Life according to this Principle, it is ten to one but he runs himself into most deplorable Mischiefs. For God sees not as Man sees. The impartial Judge of the World will take account of our Actions, not according to the Opinions of the Men of this World, whom we conversed with, but according to their intrinsick Goodness or Turpitude. He will indeed make great Allowances for Mens Ignorance and Mistakes, where they were unavoidable, but there is no reason to expect that he should grant any Favour in those Cases where Men saw their Duty well enough, and knew likewise what Strefs God in his Word laid upon it; and yet would be bold to transgress it, because they saw other Men did. The Sin was a modish Sin, and therefore they made a slight Matter of it.

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tained about Sins of Infirmary. We all know that Sins of Infirmary are consistent with a State of Salvation, otherwise none of Mankind could be saved. For the best Men are attended with many Weaknesses and Imperfections, and have daily Occasion to implore the Divine Mercy upon the Account there-

James 3. 2. of. *In many things we offend all.* And in truth, as the State of Mankind now is, we may account him the best and worthiest Christian (not he who never transgresseth God's Laws, for perhaps there is no such Man, but he) who hath the fewest Mixtures of Folly and Sin in his Life. All this now is true: but because this is true, we will have a great deal more to be so, which is not: for finding that the best of Men have Infirmit-
ties, and that those Infirmit-
ties shall be no Bar to their Salvation, we are apt to conclude, that our Sins, how grievous or how habitual soever they be, are but our Infirmit-
ties likewise, and that we may go to Heaven for all them. The Truth is, to that unrea-
sonable Degree of Latitude have we com-
monly extended Sins of Infirmary, or those Sins which are consistent with a State of Holiness and Happiness, that really there are hardly any, but Atheists or downright pro-
fane irreligious Persons, but may very well shelter all the Sins and great Miscarriages of their Lives under this comfortable Name. For what are those Sins which we call Sins of Infirmary, but such Sins (be they in their
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own Nature never so heinous) as we do often resolve against, and are perhaps troubled at after we have done them, but which yet we continue in the Practice of? There are a great many who have so far a Sense of Religion, that they cannot avoid being troubled and concerned at their wicked Lives. It is with some Reluctancy that they act as they do: And they cannot forbear accusing themselves, and perhaps resolving to do so no more: But yet for all that they live never the better: They do not amend one Fault for all those Convictions and Resolutions. Let the Sins which reign in them be what they will, Drunkenness, or Lewdness, or Covetousness, or Injustice, or Malice, or Neglect of God's Worship, or the like, yet the next Temptation that comes in their Way to any of these Sins, they shall not fail to comply with, tho' it was not a Month before that they were troubled at themselves for living at this Rate, and resolved to forsake these Courses for ever. But now all the while they remain in this Condition, the Sins they commit must needs be Sins of Infirmary, because really it is their Infirmary and Weakness that they do not conquer them. Their Intentions, their Purposes, and Designs, are without doubt right and honest, and therefore they cannot doubt but that they shall be accepted upon the Account of them, tho' they never live up to their good Principles,

ciples, nor conquer any of those Sins they labour under.

This, I say, is our common Opinion concerning Sins of Infirmity. And there is no doubt Hundreds of Persons under the Protection and Security of this Notion mean very well, and live very ill, nay and perhaps die so, and yet, after all, think they shall go to Heaven.

But now all this is extremely false Reasoning. It is true, it is the Mens Weakness and Infirmity that they live in a Course of Sin, contrary to all their Sentiments and all their serious Purposes: But yet for all that, if the Sins they live in the Practice of be open known Sins, such Sins as are plainly forbid by the Laws of the Gospel, and are there declared against for such, as shall exclude from the Kingdom of Heaven, they are not Sins of Infirmity, but wilful presumptuous Sins, which the Men shall answer for to God at the Peril of their Souls; with what Reluctance soever they committed them, or what Resolutions soever they used to make against them. For do not deceive your selves, that only is a Sin of Infirmity which a Man cannot help; that which a Man is drawn into thro' Surprise, or want of Time to consider. But all Habits and Customs of Sin fall under another Denomination. If a Man make it his Practice to break God's Laws in his Actions, and to do such things not only once or twice, but customarily, as often as the

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Temptation returns, which Christ Jesus hath most strictly forbid, let every such Man know that these Sins of his are not the Effects of Weakness and Infirmity, but are the Fruits of a wicked unsanctified Heart. And till his Mind and Spirit be transformed into a better Frame, so transformed that it hath Influence upon his whole Life and Conversation, so as to make that holy and regular, as to the main Course of it, he is not to think himself in the Number of God's Children, or any ways qualified to receive the Rewards of good Men in the Life to come. Whosoever seriously applies himself to forsake his Sins, and to lead a holy and a Christian Life, shall certainly (thro' the Grace of God, which is never wanting to such Persons) compass his Purposes and Designs. *Sin shall not have Dominion over him, but Rom. 6. he shall in all things be Conqueror, thro' Christ¹⁴. 8. 37. that loveth us.* But for a Man still to be convinced of the Evil of his Ways, and yet still to continue in those Ways, is an Argument of a trifling Soul, which hath never yet sincerely set itself to seek God, or its own Salvation.

5. The last Head I shall treat of, as an Occasion of Mens Deceits about the Terms of their Salvation is this, the misinterpreting and misapplying some Words and Phrases of Scripture which do summarily express the Duties required of us in order to our attaining everlasting Happiness, in such a Manner,
as

as to make them consist with a careless or wicked Life.

There are abundance of Instances to be given under this Head. But I shall here only take Notice of those two famous things by which the Writers of the New Testament are every where accustomed to express the whole of a Christian's Duty. Sometimes in that Book all that Christ and his Apostles are said to require of Men in order to their future Happiness, is only a *True Faith*; and sometimes only Repentance. Thus as for

Mark 16.
16.

Faith; our Saviour saith, that *Whosoever believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but whosoever believeth not, shall be damned.* St.

Rom. 3.
28. 5. 1.
&c.

Paul tells us over and over again, that by *Faith only we are justified.* The Consequence now that is drawn from hence is, that whosoever hath true Faith, shall certainly be saved, supposing that he die in that Condition: And indeed this is undeniably true; as true as the Gospel is. But now abundance of Men have such a Notion of true Faith, as may very well consist with a bad Life. For it is in their Account either a bare believing of the Truths of the Gospel, or a believing as the true Catholick Church (for so the Papists call the Church of Rome) believes, or a Resting and Reliance upon Christ, and him only, without any Merits of their own, or such an Application of Christ's Righteousness and Merits to themselves in particular, as that they are persuaded they

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are the Elect of God, and that all the Promises of the Gospel do belong to themselves. I pray now consider, how easy it is for a Man to have any of these kinds of Faith, and yet continue to be a wicked Man. And it is evident, that the Generality of Christians in the World have no other Notion of Faith, but what may be reduced to some one of these four which I have now named.

Thus again, sometimes all that is required in the Gospel to our Salvation, is expressed by the Word Repentance. *Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Repent, and be baptized for the Remission of your Sins. Whensoever a Sinner repents he shall find Mercy, &c.* But now how easy a Matter is it, as things are commonly apprehended, for any Man among us to have true Repentance? I pray, what do most Men take Repentance to be, but this; a being heartily sorry when we have done amiss, and wishing we had not done it? And indeed the Word imports no more in our *English* Language. Every Man who hath done a thing which he is sorry for, and wishes was undone, may be truly said to repent of it, as we use the Word. Now since it is plain that the Holy Scriptures require no more of any Man in order to his Salvation, but either Faith, or Repentance, or, at most, Faith and Repentance together, how easy

is it for any Man, tho' otherwise very bad and wicked in his Life, upon very slender Grounds, to believe that he hath both these Qualities? For who can hinder such a Man, when he finds in himself that he believes the Gospel, and is heartily desirous to enjoy all the Benefits of Christ's Passion, and is sorry for his Sins past, and wishes that he had lived a better Life, and purposes to do so for the future (nay, and dies with those Resolutions :) I say, who can hinder such a Man from having an Expectation of all the Mercies of God that are made over to true Believers, and true Penitents in the Gospel?

All this is very true. But then these People run upon this great Mistake all the while, and they ought frequently to be put in mind of it, *viz.* that they apply these Words, *Faith* and *Repentance*, to quite other Purposes than the Scripture design'd them: They construe them in a quite different Sense and Meaning than they were intended. For certainly the *Scripture justifying Faith*, as appears by undeniable Arguments, is only such a *Faith*, as, together with the Belief of Jesus Christ, produceth a new Creature. And certainly the *Scripture Repentance* is only such a Repentance, as, together with the being sorry for our Sins, produceth a thorough Reformation of our Manners. Now where-ever these two things are effected, that Man is sure
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of going to Heaven : But if either of these be wanting, the Man has only the Sound of the Words for his Title to Heaven, but he wants that which is the true Meaning of them.

This, then, is the Conclusion of the whole Matter. *Whoever doth Righteousness is righteous, and therefore let no Man deceive you.* It is in vain to think of any other Method of going to Heaven, but the plain common Way, that is as old as Mankind, and bears date with the first Discovery of God's Will to them : And that is nothing else but a holy, virtuous, religious Life ; a hearty Fear, and Love, and Trust in God ; a sincere Belief of all his Revelations ; and, together with that, a suitable Conversation in all Sobriety, and Righteousness, and Godliness. This is to be *righteous as Christ is righteous* ; and without this, all our other Speculations and Contrivances for the securing our future State, will prove perfectly vain and ineffectual.

The thing is so plain, that we are very unthinking Creatures if ever we be deceived as to this Matter ; especially since we have so many Cautions given us by Jesus Christ and his Apostles, not to suffer our selves to be deceived with any vain Words. Eph. 5. 6. But, and if we will be deceived, yet nevertheless (as the Apostle tells us) *God will* Gal. 6. 7. *not be mocked.* There are no Tricks to be put upon him. He easily sees thro' all

our Disguises. He knows whether our Heart is right towards him in all things, or whether we would impose upon him by some little Device, that we have learned from the Party we converse with, to get to Heaven in a more compendious, expeditious, cheaper Way than what the Gospel

Heb. 4. 13. teaches. *All things are naked and open to the Eyes of him with whom we have to do.* And the Rule he hath set to Himself in his Dealings with Mankind, and from which he will never depart (as the Apostle tells

Rom. 2. v. 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11. us) is none other than this, *To reward every Man according to his Deeds: To them who by patient Continuance in Well-doing seek for Glory, and Honour, and Immortality, Eternal Life: But to them who obey not the Truth, but obey Unrighteousness, Indignation and Wrath, Tribulation and Anguish upon every Soul of Man that doth Evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile: But Glory, Honour, and Peace, to every Man that worketh Good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile: For there is no respect of Persons with God.*



SERMON VII.

*The Gospel Proofs of a future State;
and the Nature of the Happiness of
Heaven.*

Preached before Queen Anne, 1707.

2 TIM. i. 10.

*Who hath abolished Death, and hath brought
Life and Immortality to Light, thro' the
Gospel.*



HERE are two of the happy and glorious Effects of our Saviour's Undertaking for us. By his Death, *he hath abolished Death*; and by his Resurrection from the Dead, *he hath brought Life and Immortality to Light*. But how are we to understand this Saying, that Christ *hath abolished Death*? Do not all Men yet die? And doth not St. Paul say, that *the last Enemy that shall be destroyed is Death*? ^{1 Cor. 15. 26.}

This is true : but yet the Power and Dominion of Death, as to all faithful Christians, is long ago abolished and destroyed by our Saviour ; and that is all that is meant here. *St. Paul* in his Writings usually speaks of Death as of a Person, as of some mighty Conqueror, who had gained an universal Empire over Mankind ; as in truth all Mankind, by reason of their Sins, were obnoxious for ever, to be held in Captivity by it. But now Christ by his Death hath vanquished this Enemy, hath broken those Chains, and set us free from that perpetual Vassalage : So that Death shall not from henceforth have Dominion over us ; but we have at this present, thro' the Merits of Christ's Sufferings, an actual Right to another Life ; and when we leave this World (if we persevere in the Faith of Christ) shall be put into an actual Possession of it. And that is the full Meaning of this Expression of Christ's *abolishing Death*.

As for the other Part of the Text, upon which I mean to dwell at this time, namely, Christ's *bringing Life and Immortality to Light by the Gospel*, The Meaning of that I take to be this, *viz. That Christ, by his Gospel, hath made a much clearer Revelation ; and by his Resurrection from the Dead, given a much stronger Demonstration of a future Life and Immortality than ever the World had before.*

We do not think that the People of God, before our Saviour's Appearance, were altogether ignorant of this Truth, for there is no doubt but the Patriarchs of old, and all the pious *Jews* who lived to our Saviour's Time, did expect and hope for a heavenly Country after this Life; and *looked upon themselves only as Strangers and Pilgrims in this World.* Heb. 11. Nay, it is very ¹³ certain that the better sort of Heathens were not without some comfortable Glimpses and Presages of a happy State after this; and several of the Philosophers spake great and excellent things concerning it. But yet, notwithstanding this, the Promises of eternal Life in the Old Testament were so obscure, and the Discourses of the wisest Men among the Heathens were so wholly conjectural, that we may truly say, that all the Notices they had of this Business were but in a manner *Darkness*, in Comparison of that exceeding clear *Light* that Christ brought into the World. And therefore it is with Reason said by the Apostle here, that *he brought Life and Immortality to Light, by the Gospel*: because when it was obscure and dark before, he brought it into a clear and perfect Light.

Two things I shall do upon this Subject.

First of all, display some of that Light which Christ by his Gospel brought into the World about this Matter.

And, *Secondly*, Give some Account of that Life and Immortality which he thus brought to Light : That so when both the Evidence of the Truth of the Thing, and likewise the Importance and Invaluableness of the Blessing it contains in it, lie before us, we may be persuaded most earnestly to set about the obtaining our Share in this Life and Immortality, which is made over to Mankind by our Lord Jesus.

I. I begin with the Evidence that the Gospel gives us concerning this Life, or the Christian Way of demonstrating that there is another World. This is not a slight Point, but of the greatest Importance imaginable. And however we are taught from our Infancy to believe it, yet it will concern us all, if ever we mean to live virtuously and comfortably, and to bear up against all the Temptations, and Ruffles, and Disturbances, and Afflictions which the Circumstances of our Condition in this World will necessarily expose us to : I say, it will concern us above all things to be thoroughly satisfied of the Grounds and Reasons upon which we do believe a future State of Immortality. For we may assure our selves, when all is done, there is no such Security of our Virtue, no such Preservative

servative against Temptations, no such Support under any kind of Discouragements we meet with, as a firm, rational, well-grounded Persuasion of another Life.

It is very true, that Reason and natural Light will furnish a Man who is thoughtful and inquisitive with abundance of Arguments, from whence he may conclude, that in all Probability God designed Mankind to be immortal, and that good Men shall actually be so. Such Arguments, for Instance, are the Nature of our Souls, and their Faculties; the strong Appetites and Desires which are woven into all Mens Constitutions to live for ever, which the better and wiser any Man grows, the more strong he finds them in himself; the Fears and Presages that wicked Men have of a future Judgment; the Necessity of Rewards and Punishments, in order both to the making Men virtuous, and to the vindicating the Justice of God's Providence in the Distribution of things in this World. All these, I say, are good Proofs to a thinking contemplative Mind, that there is to be another State after this, wherein good Men shall be rewarded, and wicked Men punished. But yet, notwithstanding, we see by sufficient Experience, that the greatest Part of Mankind are not much capable of being wrought upon by such abstracted Arguments; nay, we see the wisest and most considerate Men in the World, after
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all their Enquiries and Speculations before our Saviour's Time, did but very little towards convincing Mankind of the Certainty of these things, how firmly soever they might believe them themselves. So that we have need of another Sort of Arguments, another Kind of Demonstration, for the clearing and ascertaining these Points to us, and rendering them useful and operative as to the Conduct of our Lives. And this is, That we say our Lord Jesus gave us by his Gospel, and particularly by his Resurrection from the Dead.

The Truth is, Life and Immortality are things perfectly in God's Disposal, and it depends entirely on his Pleasure, whether he will bestow them upon Mankind or no. Now tho', as I said before, we have a great many Arguments drawn from the Wisdom, and Justice, and Goodness of God, the Nature and Faculties of our own Souls, that may render it very credible that God will make good Men immortally happy in another State; yet we cannot be so certain of this, unless it should please God, by some authentick Messenger, to assure us that he would do so. One such Revelation of God's Will, well attested, would be worth an hundred speculative metaphysical Arguments for the convincing us about this Matter. And such a Messenger God hath sent; such a Revelation he hath given us, *viz.* by our Lord Jesus, who
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came down from God as a publick Embassador to all the World. And one of the great Ends of his coming, was to assure all Mankind, in the Name of God, that there was *Life and Immortality* to be had in another World, and not only so, but to teach them the certain way how they might all arrive to it. He left those Mansions of Bliss to bring us the happy Tidings of them, and withal to assure us, that they were in his own Disposal, and that *who-so*-John 3.16.
ever believed in him, should not perish, but have everlasting Life. This, indeed, was the main Argument of all his Discourses, and it is the main Argument of the Gospel.

Now that our Saviour affirmed nothing in this Matter but what is true, and promised no more to his Disciples, than what he was able to make good, and would do so in due time, we have all the Evidence imaginable.

For, 1. He was a Person who of all the Men in the World one would have the least Suspicion of, that he was a Deceiver, tho' he had given no other Confirmation at all of his Doctrine, than only the Goodness and Innocence of his own Life.

No Person ever appeared in the World of so much Goodness, of such exemplary Virtues and Holiness as he was Owner of. But among all his Virtues, his Simplicity and Integrity were so conspicuous, that it was almost impossible to imagine that he
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could carry on any other Design in the World, than only to do good to Mankind.

2. There was no just Exception to be taken at any of his Doctrines, they being all pure and heavenly, such as were worthy of God, and agreeable to the Principles of Mens Minds, and tended much to the making the World both better and happier. Which Consideration adds a great Degree of Credibility to what he delivered in this Matter we are speaking of.

3. That he intended not to impose upon others as to this Point of a future Life, but did himself verily believe the Truth of what he taught, we have this undeniable Argument, *viz.* that he freely and willingly laid down his Life for the Confirmation of it; which he would never have done, had he not firmly believed he should be rewarded in another World. This he himself tells us, that *he laid down his Life, that he might take it up again.*

John 10.
17.

4. That he was not mistaken in what he believ'd himself, and what he taught others to believe, is evident from the divine and wonderful Works which he wrought throughout the whole Course of his Ministry, for the Confirmation of his Doctrine; particularly his raising up several Persons from Death to Life. These were the Credentials he shew'd for his Commission, to preach this Doctrine. These were the

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Seal that God set to the Truth of what he delivered. It had been utterly inconsistent with the Veracity of God, and he had brought an invincible Temptation upon Mankind to believe a Falshood, if he had suffered our Saviour to have wrought these unheard of Miracles, when he professed likewise to work them for the Attestation of his Doctrine, if this Doctrine had not been true. Especially considering likewise, that it was a Doctrine, which, as I said before, no Man, in Point of Reason or Credibility, had any just Exceptions against.

5. But the fullest Demonstration of this Truth that could possibly be given, was his own Resurrection from the Grave, and his visible Ascension into Heaven, in the Presence of many Spectators, forty Days after.

(1.) For, *first* of all, herein is plainly proved the Possibility of our Resurrection from the Dead; and that we mortal Creatures who live on the Earth, are capable of being carried up into Heaven, there to dwell for ever; for that cannot be impossible which hath once been certainly and in fact done.

(2.) And, *secondly*, Christ's Resurrection doth not only prove the Possibility of ours, but also shew, that we shall certainly rise again, and live for ever in a happy State in Heaven, as he doth now. For hereby was demonstrated, beyond all Contradiction,

tion, the Truth of all his Doctrines, and therefore consequently of that which he taught concerning the other World. If this had not been true, that we shall live for ever by him, (as he hath promised us) God would have never raised him up to Life again, to deceive us a second time, and
 Acts 2. 27. in so material a thing. But seeing God
 31. *did not leave his Soul in Hell, but exalted*
 Ibid. v. 33. *him to a glorious Life, even to sit at his*
 Acts 5. 31. *right Hand, in the Fullness of Power and*
 Dignity; this is an undeniable Argument, that they *who believe in him* shall not per-
 John 6. 40. *ish neither, but be raised again as he was;* because he who had so confidently, before his Death, told his Disciples that he would thus rise again in three Days, did with the same Confidence declare to them, that he would raise them also, and bestow upon them everlasting Life. Now the first being certainly brought to pass by the Power of God, who alone could do it, there can be no doubt but the other will be made good in due time.

6. But *lastly*. To all this let me add the Testimony of the Apostles and Disciples of Christ, who after his Death, and Ascension into Heaven, went about the World preaching the Truth of their Master's Doctrines, and particularly of this Article of the Life to come. All of these
 1 Pet. 5. 1. *were so fully persuaded of the Glory that was to be revealed, that they travelled into*
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all Countries to publish these glad Tidings, and to bring over all Mankind to the Belief of Jesus, and to a Hope of eternal Life thro' him. And God was pleased to work with them, and to confirm the Truth of what they preached, by mighty Signs and Wonders: So that they themselves, as well as our Saviour, gave ocular Demonstration of another Life, by raising the Dead, and doing all those great things over again that he had done before them. And that none might suspect this to be an Impostor, they at length most of them laid down their Lives to attest the Sincerity of their Faith as to this Point.

And now can we require greater or stronger Evidence for the Truth of any thing that doth not fall under our Senses, than we have given of the Life to come? Certainly, whoever among us is an Infidel in this Point, after such evident Demonstrations as our Saviour and his Apostles have given of the Truth of it, shews himself to want Sense and Judgment, as well as Goodness.

Ay, but the Infidel may say, all the Force of these Arguments depends upon the Truth of the historical Matters of Fact that have been insisted on. But how shall we, who live at so great a Distance of time, know that there ever was such a Person in the World as Jesus Christ, or that he preached such Doctrines, or that he wrought
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such Miracles to confirm them, or that he rose from the Dead, or that he gave such Power to his Disciples after him to do those wonderful things? I answer, we may know and be assured of all these things by the same Evidence, nay much better, than we know that there was such a Person as *Julius Cæsar*, and that he obtained such Victories, and made such Alterations in the Government of *Rome*, and did such other famous Acts as are recorded of him. We none of us bore witness to these Transactions, but yet we firmly believe them upon the Credit of authentick History, and universal uncontrouled Tradition, and the permanent Effects which followed upon those Actions. Upon the same Ground therefore, and for the same Reason, we cannot refuse our Assent to all that the sacred History relates of our Saviour and his Apostles, it having all the Marks of an authentick History upon it, and being backed with the concurrent Testimony of other Writings in every Age since that. And, which is more, having at this Day standing Proofs to give Credit to it from the wonderful Alterations and Effects which followed upon these things in the World at the Time they were done, and continue visible in this very Age all the World over. So that in truth there can be no Exception made against the Scripture-History, but what may be made against any History in
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the World: Nay, I dare be bold to say, we have an hundred times greater and stronger Evidence for the Truth of the History of our Saviour, as delivered in the New Testament, than we have for the Truth of any History in the World; that is, of Things or Persons at the same Distance from us.

Blessed therefore be God, who hath made us acquainted with the Gospel of his Son, and given us such undeniable Evidence for the historical Truth of it. And blessed be our Lord Jesus, who hath in that Gospel *brought Life and Immortality* to such a certain and perfect Light. That very thing alone, tho' there was nothing else to be said for the Christian-Revelation, would sufficiently justify both the Gospel it self, and our Lord Jesus, the Author of it, to all Mankind; nay, and effectually recommend his Religion, above all others that ever were taught, to all Persons in all Nations of the World. This is our Glory, and the Privilege of our Religion, that Christ alone hath brought certain Tidings of another Life. He alone hath ascertained Mankind of that great important Proposition, concerning which, they were in an Uncertainty before, *viz. That verily there is a Re-* Ps. 58. 11.
ward for the Righteous; doubtless there is a God that judgeth the Earth. Our Lord Jesus hath not only told us this, but he hath proved it undeniably, and beyond all

Exception, by raising himself from the Dead, and taking Possession of the Kingdom of Heaven by that same Spirit of his, which he hath assured us shall raise us up also one Day, and carry us to that blessed Place where he now reigns in Glory.

O happy Tidings! O glorious Gospel! Christ Jesus is come from Heaven to demonstrate that Point which puzzled all the Wits of the World before. Christ hath *brought Life and Immortality to Light by the Gospel.*

¹ Pet. 1. 3. Christ hath *begotten us again to a lively Hope, by his Resurrection from the Dead.* He hath shew'd us that there is a happy glorious State to be attained in Heaven after our short Labours here. He hath directed us likewise most plainly and certainly in the Way and Methods by which we may attain to it. And he himself is gone before us to take Possession of it in our Name, and in our Behalf, and to prepare Mansions for us against the time he comes and fetches us thither. Oh! What Support is here to our Faith! What Encouragement is here to our Hopes! What Obligation is here to our Obedience! What an irresistible Argument is here given us to break loose from our Sins, and our vicious Conversation, and from henceforward to devote our selves entirely to the Service of Jesus Christ our great Lord and Master, who hath done so abundantly for us *above what we could ask or think!*

Eph. 3. 20.

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These are the Inferences, this is the Use and Application we ought to make to our selves of this great Point; and which will appear more reasonable, if we attend a little, in the second Place, to the mighty and invaluable Blessings that are contained in that *Life and Immortality, which Christ hath brought to Light thro' the Gospel.*

II. What is this Life and Immortality? Certainly it is not barely living for ever without any Danger of dying any more; for, in truth, if the immortal Life hereafter were not better and happier than the mortal Life is, generally speaking, in this World, I know no such Reason why we should be so very desirous of it, or solicitous about it. But God hath made better, infinitely better, Provisions for us. The Truth is, the Life we here lead, tho' we call it Life, may rather, for the most part, be called a continual Dying; because the most of us feel and experience a great deal more of Pain, and Uneasiness, and Restlessness, and Vexation in it, than we do of true solid Joy, and Pleasure, and Satisfaction. But to live truly, is to live happily. This is the Sense of all Men, and this is the Language of Scripture. We may as justly draw a Comparison between the State of Infancy and the State of grown Men, between Sicknes and Health, between Poverty and Nakedness and the greatest

Plenty and Affluence of the most prosperous Condition, as we can, between the Life we now lead, and the Life that good Men shall live in the World to come.

The Life and Immortality which Christ hath brought to Light, and which he hath promised to all his faithful Disciples, is a Comprehension of the greatest Blessings that the Tongue of Man can express, or the Heart of Man conceive. It is to be translated from a State of Dulness and Anxiety, Trouble, Affliction, Disappointments, Vexations, real Grief, solid Cares, and but imaginary Pleasures, to a State of true Happiness and Content, and manly and rational Pleasures; Pleasures not interrupted by Sickness or any sad Accidents, not dull'd by being weary of them, or cloy'd with them, not disturbed either by the Insults of our Enemies, or the Concernments for our miserable Friends, or our own Inequality of Temper.

It is to have all the Powers and Faculties of our Souls advanced to the highest Perfection that they are capable of. So that our Understandings will be perfected by the Knowledge of the best Things, and our Wills by the Love of them. And we shall live in perfect Ease and Peace, in perfect Freedom and Liberty, in a perfect Enjoyment of ourselves, and the greatest Good we can be Partakers of, and that in the most perfect Ways.

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It is to have our Bodies that slept in the Dust raised again and united to our Souls; no longer gross, fleshly, corruptible Bodies, but *spiritual*, heavenly, immortal Phil. 3. 21. ones, *fashioned like unto Christ's glorious* Rom. 8. 24 *Body in which he now sits at God's right Hand.*

It is to live *in the City of the great King*, Mat. 5. 35. the *heavenly Jerusalem*, a Paradise of Plea- Heb. 12. 22. sure, a Country of perpetual Light and Bliss, where the *Glory of the Lord fills the Place*, and where every Object that presents itself adds a new Beauty to it, and contributes to the Increase of our Delight. It is to spend our Days in the most noble and agreeable Employments, in viewing and contemplating all the various Works of God, in admiring the wonderful Contrivance of his Providence in all Ages, in adoring his infinite Love to the Sons of Men, in reflecting upon our own inexpressible Happiness that ariseth from his Communications to us, and in singing Hymns of Praise, and Joy, and Triumph to him, and to our Lord Jesus upon Account of all these Things.

It is to dwell in a Place where there are no Objects of Pity or Compassion, of Anger or Hatred, or Distrust, every Person there being as happy as we can wish, and all increasing the Happiness of each other, by the entire Love, and Kindness, and Friendship that is maintained among them.

Lastly, It is to be with Jesus Christ, and to *behold* all *his* Glory, and to live for ever seeing and enjoying the great God Almighty, *in whose Presence is the Fulness of Joy, and at whose right Hand there are Pleasures for evermore.* — These are the Things, in short, which go to the making up that Life which Christ hath brought to Light by his Gospel.

I have nothing to add more to this Description, but what the Term of *Immortality*, that is here added to it, doth naturally bring to our Thoughts. Let us therefore consider a little what that Word contains in it.

Our Life, if we be sincere Christians, shall be unspeakably glorious and happy. But that which adds the Crown to all the rest, is, that it shall be an immortal Life; a Life without Danger of dying; a Happiness without Danger of losing: As it will be Blessedness in Perfection, so it will be Blessedness without End. For this is the *everlasting Life* that our Saviour hath so often promised. This is *the Inheritance, immortal, undefiled, that fadeth not away,*
¹ Pct. 1. 4. *reserved in the Heavens,* as St. Peter speaks. *It is a Kingdom which cannot be shaken; a Building of God, not made with Hands, eternal in the Heavens,* as St. Paul speaks. Innumerable Ages shall never put a Period to it: But after all the Ages we can conceive; nay, tho' we were Millions of Ages adding

adding Numbers to Numbers, yet, after all those Ages so numbered or past, good Men shall be then as glorious, as happy, as full of Love, Joy, and Peace, as they were the first Moment they entred upon that State; nay, and very probably a great many Degrees more happy, more glorious, more wise and knowing, more full of Love, and Joy, and Peace, than they were at the Beginning. For God is an infinite Good; and we can never come to the End of his Perfections, because they are infinite, like himself. But the longer we live, and we shall live for ever, the more we shall discover of them; and the more we do discover, the more we shall understand; the more we understand, the more we shall love; the more we understand and love, the more we shall enjoy, and the greater will our Happiness be, and so from Ages to Ages.

Oh! what shall we return unto the Lord for all his Benefits! Let us love him heartily, serve him diligently, devote ourselves entirely to do the Work that he hath sent us into the World to do. Let us mortify all our carnal, worldly, vicious Affections, and at last grow out of Love with the insipid, dull Gratifications of this sensual Life, and breathe and pant after that glorious *Life and Immortality* that awaits us in another World. Let us think from whom we came, and what we came hither for; and what a

noble Work we are put upon; and what a glorious Issue and Conclusion we may expect, if we be faithful in it. And let us every Day praise God, who hath prepared so great Things for us; and our Lord Jesus, who hath made known to us the Certainty of them, and taught us the Way how we may attain them.



S E R-



SERMON VIII.

The great Folly and Danger of delaying Repentance.

Preach'd before Queen Anne, 1708.

PSALM cxix. 59, 60.

*I thought on my Ways, and turned my Feet
unto thy Testimonies.*

*I made haste and delayed not to keep thy Com-
mandments.*



THE following Week, which we commonly call *Passion Week*, being, of all the Time of *Lent*, more especially set apart for the Purposes of Religion and Devotion, for the examining the State of our Souls, and exercising Acts of Repentance, that by deeply considering what bitter Things our Saviour suffered for our Sakes, we may be brought to an Abhor-
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rence of them, and enter into Resolutions of forsaking them for ever, and so devote ourselves anew to God on *Easter-day* by coming to his Table: I say, this being the Business of this Week, I do not know how I can more usefully spend this half Hour, than by endeavouring to excite you all to the Imitation of this Practice of holy *David*, which you find in the Words which I have read unto you. And since there is no Difficulty, either in the Expression, or in the Sense of my Text, that needs any explaining, I shall apply myself, without more ado, to the Thing I design.

I hope there are few of you here present, but have so far, with the Psalmist, *thought upon your Ways*, that if you have not already *turned your Feet unto God's Testimonies* (as he here expresseth it;) if you have not already set yourselves to serve God, and to mind the Work of Religion, yet you are fully convinced, that some Time or other you must do it, if you mean not to perish everlastingly: Nay, I doubt not but you heartily purpose and resolve, that if God grant you Life and Health, you will do it. But now why should you not presently put these Purposes in Execution? Why should you not with *David* here *make haste, and without further Delay*, apply your Minds and Study to the *keeping of God's Commandments*? Why should you not immediately break loose from
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from the Sins which hold you in Captivity, and give all Diligence, by a strict, sober, virtuous and devout Life, to make your ^{2 Pet. i. 10.} Calling and Election sure? (as the Apostle expresses it) *that so*, when you come to die, *an Entrance may be ministred unto you abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord Jesus?* Let me therefore, this Day, call upon you in the Name of God, now while he affords you Health and Strength, let me exhort you to follow *David's Example* in the Text, *to make haste, and delay not to keep God's Commandments.*

v. 11.

For the more effectual stirring you up to this, give me Leave to represent four Things to you, which I shall make the Heads of my Exhortation.

I. First of all; pray let it be consider'd, that the longer you delay this Work, still the more difficult it will be to you, and the more Labour and Pains you will be put to, if ever you prosecute it successfully. This all the World must acknowledge to be true upon these two Accounts.

1st. The longer you defer this Matter, the more unfit you are to undertake it: And 2^{dly}, the Work still grows greater upon your Hands.

1. First of all, the longer you defer this Work, the more unfit you render yourselves for the Performance of it. For it is here,

here, as in all other Arts and Habits, that are to be acquired by Exercise and Application of Mind, the longer we put off any Design of that Nature, the greater Unfitness and Incapacity we shall find, even in our natural Powers, for the compassing of it. One cannot be thought so capable of becoming a learned Man, who begins to study at the Age of thirty or forty, as he who hath applied his Mind to Learning from his Childhood. The Faculties of a Man's Soul are in a constant Flux, and the Nature of them is such, that the more early we exercise them about any Thing, the more prompt we shall find them in it, and the less Trouble we shall have in keeping them to it. It just fares with them as with those that learn Musick. The younger they are when they begin with that Art, the more pliable and nimble their Fingers are in touching their Instrument. But if they stay till their Sinews are knit, they will find them much more stiff and unmanageable. How slight soever the Comparison is, yet it truly sets forth the State of the Powers of Mankind, as to the great Work of Religion. The longer we delay the employing our Faculties that way, the more unfit they will be for it; and especially if we neglect the Thing so long that Nature begins to decline, and the Heat and Briskness of our Spirits do abate. In this Case it will be a very hard Tug for us

to make the Powers of our Souls in any tolerable Degree serviceable to us for the Work of Religion, in case we have not laid out ourselves in that way before. To which we add further, that all those Things which do now indispose us, and render us unfit for the Service of God, will more and more do so every Day, and consequently we are every Day less capable of undertaking the Work. Whatsoever is a Hindrance of that Work To-day, will be so To-morrow, and a greater too. For the longer any of us gives way to any evil Affection, or any sinful Custom, still the stronger it grows upon us, and still more untoward and incapable we are of receiving contrary Impressions. Let no Man flatter himself therefore with such Thoughts as these; I am now indisposed for the pursuing Virtue, and living religiously; I have other Inclinations, which at present carry away my Thoughts and Designs, and I cannot easily break loose from them. But I hope in God I shall, some Time or other, be in a better Humour, and then I will be good, then I will serve God. O Man, do not deceive thyself with these vain Imaginations! If thou be'st not in Humour to be good To-day, thou wilt much less be so To-morrow. For thou wilt always have the same Inclinations or Affections, or others as bad, to hinder thee, and by thy Delays to give Check to them, they still grow stronger,

stronger, and thou growest weaker. In truth, he that defers the Amendment of his Manners, tho' it be but for an Hour, upon Account of his present Unfitness, is just in the Case of that silly Countryman (it is the Comparison of an heathen Poet) that had a great Mind to go over a River, but would stay upon the Bank till all the Water of it was run out. But there, alas, he may for ever stay, for the River runs on, and will always continue so to do, and possibly with a greater Flood.

2. But secondly, As all Delays in this Business of keeping God's Commandments make us more unfit to go about it, so do they also render the Work itself much greater, and consequently more difficult to be performed. It is in this Case as with a Man, who being bound for a certain Place, instead of going the direct Way that leads to it, steers his Course the quite contrary. Now such a Man, if ever he comes to his Journey's End, must not only travel thro' all those Stages, which, if he had taken the direct Road, must have been passed by him in order to the arriving where he would be, but he must also tread over again all those Steps that he went wrong; so that by this means you see he hath made his Journey much longer than otherwise it would have been, and so much the longer, by how much the farther he hath gone out of the Way. We are all of us in this
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Life upon a Journey. The Place whither we are bound is the Kingdom of Heaven. The only Way that leads thither, is a Life of Virtue and Holiness. Opposite to this is a Course of Vice and Sin, as being the Road that leads to Hell and Destruction. All of us now that pursue this latter Course, the further we go in it the more we are out of the Way, and consequently the more Steps have we to make, the more Toil and Travel to undergo, if ever we come to our Journey's End. This then is all the Benefit we reap by continuing on in a Course of Sin: Some Time or other we must repent; and the longer we delay it, we have very comfortably heaped up to ourselves so many more and more grievous Sins to repent of. And who, alas! but he who feels it, can express the insupportable Weight and Load that a continued Course of Sins, with all their aggravating Circumstances, doth lay upon the Conscience of a Man when it is once seriously awakened. We must all get virtuous Habits sooner or later. But by putting the Work still off, we have done ourselves this Kindness, that the effecting of it will cost us ten times the Pains that it would have done, had we begun then when we were first convinced that it was our Duty to do it. Where then is the Wisdom to defer these Things; to multiply our Work to that Degree, that it may perhaps exceed
our

our utmost Strength to perform it ; to lay such Burdens upon our Shoulders, as will possibly endanger the breaking of them. Oh, therefore, let us think, whenever we are tempted to commit a Sin, Why should I do this Action, which, if ever I come to repent of (and I must repent of it, if ever I mean to go to Heaven) will cost me Sorrow and Trouble more than enough? Whenever God puts good Thoughts into our Hearts, let us say to ourselves, Why should I not now pursue these holy Motions, and bring them to some Effect? It is certain, if I do it not at all, I am undone ; and if I put the Thing off till another Time, it will be much more difficult for me to do it. — Oh, that we were as wise in these our great Concernments as we are in every little trifling Business of this World ; we might save ourselves, God knows how much Labour and Trouble, which otherwise will unavoidably come upon us, or else that which is a thousand times worse!

II. But to proceed to a second Argument, wherewith I would enforce the Practice of the Text. Easiness and Quickness of Dispatch is not the only Convenience of setting presently upon the Work of Religion, as neither is the increasing our Labour, and the Difficulty of the Work the only Inconvenience of delaying it ; but further, let it be considered, that by making

ing haste to keep God's Commandments, as *David* here did, we mightily consult the Pleasure and Comfort of our following Days, as, on the contrary, by delaying it we necessarily prepare Fears and Disquietude, and unavoidable Anxieties of Mind all our Life after. He who long pursues a vicious Course, and returns not till the latter End of his Days, must never expect either to live or die in so great Peace, or so assured a Prospect of being happy in the other World, tho' he be never so diligent and sincere in his Religion, as he who begins betimes. All his Hopes will be mingled with sad Fears of his Condition; the Sense of the many grievous Sins of his Life so long persisted in, will still be afflicting his Conscience, and he will still be doubtful whether he hath sufficiently repented of them, and whether God hath received him to Favour. As he must take greater Pains in the working out his Salvation than those who engaged early in the Business, so must he do it likewise with greater Fear and Trembling; nay, it may be, he will not be freed from his Doubts and Perplexities till he finds himself in another State.

This is the unavoidable Consequence of putting off the Business of Religion till our latter Days. Why therefore should we not now begin to live so, as when we come to be old, if ever we be so, we shall wish we had lived? Why should we not now in

our Vigour and Strength, make some Provisions wherewith to sustain and support ourselves under the Burden and Infirmities of old Age? Why should we, by our present Trifling, render the Remainder of our Life solicitous and uncomfortable, if not full of Disquiet, Distraction and Amazement? O let us now imagine what kind of Thoughts we shall have when we come to die! How shall we then wish that we had served God, and given up ourselves to Virtue and Piety even from our Childhood! How shall we regret every Year, and every Day, that we have lavished away in Pleasure, or in Idleness, or in Worldliness, or any other Way, to the Neglect of our spiritual Concernments! The more Haste we make to be good, the more shall we then thank God and ourselves for it. But all Delay, according to the Degree of it, will increase our Trouble, and render our everlasting Condition more doubtful and unsecure, at least to our own Apprehension.

III. Let it be further considered, that by *making Haste, without Delay, to keep God's Commandments*, we do not only more consult the Comfort and Happiness of our following Days, but also our Happiness in the future State, which will be so much the greater, by how much the earlier we begun to be religious. This is my third
Argu-

Argument, wherewith I would press this Point upon you. — It is a known Truth, that all who are happy in the other World are not equally happy; but there are several Degrees of Glory there, as *one Star differeth from another Star in Glory*, which is the Apostle's Comparison. The righteous Judge of the World proportioneth every Man's Reward to his Work; and therefore they who have more retained their Innocence in this Life, they who have spent more of their Time in the Service of God, and have been guilty of fewer Crimes and Interruptions in their Duty, and have made greater Progress and Advancement in all Christian Graces and Virtues, these will receive a far more glorious Crown in the Day of Judgment, than they who have misemployed the greatest Part of their Time and their Talents in a Course of Vanity and Sin, and do at last return to Wisdom and Sobriety. It is not to be imagined, according to the common Rules of Equity, (tho' we had no divine Revelation for it, as yet we have very clearly) that such as have served their Lusts, and done the Drudgery of Satan for the greatest Part of their Lives, and at last, when their natural Heat and Vigour is spent, do change their Master, and list themselves into the Service of our Lord Jesus; (tho' we suppose they are accepted, as being sincere in their Repentance, tho' it was late begun) yet, I say, it cannot be

¹ Cor. 15.
41.

imagin'd but they will fall extremely short, as to the Degree of their Happiness, of those who devoted the best of their Strength and of their Time to God.

This Consideration, tho' it doth concern all Men whatsoever, yet doth it in an especial Manner concern young Persons, such as have a great deal of Time *before them*, as we commonly speak. O how happy would it be for such, if they would seriously lay this Matter to Heart, before either a Habit of Carelessness, or Sensuality, or Worldly-mindedness hath got Possession of them! Such Persons have yet their Fortunes to make, both for this World and the other. What Success they may meet with as to their worldly Concernments, be they never so diligent in their Business, I dare not answer for. For in this World, as Solomon has told us, *the Race is not always to the Swift, nor the Battle to the Strong, nor Bread to the Wise, nor Riches to the Man of Understanding, nor yet Favour to Men of Skill, but Time and Chance happeneth to them all.* But then, as to their Concernments in the other World, that is not so doubtful a Business; for I dare positively pronounce to them, that they have now such Opportunities put into their Hands, that if they do make use of them, and improve them as they should, they cannot fail of laying up to themselves a great Stock both of Virtue here, and of Glory and Happiness

Ecclef. 9.
11.

piness hereafter : Far greater than that of those who spend the first Part of their Life loosely and carelessly, and afterward begin to bethink themselves, and entertain better Counsels, all along supposing that they continue equally diligent. However they may fail of their worldly Aims and Designs, yet they can never be disappointed as to this. We say, and we say truly, Happy is the Man who at any time of his Life doth seriously apply himself to Virtue and Goodness; yet it must be owned by all, that much more happy is he who hath walked in the Paths of Virtue from his Childhood, and hath never made any great Wounds in his Conscience, by going astray from his heavenly Father in any gross Instances, but hath all along pursued the Ways of God with Care and Industry from the Time that he was first made acquainted with them. Oh, what a vast Treasure of Glory and Reward may such a one by his Diligence purchase to himself above other Men ! And thus much of my third Argument. But if all this will not prevail upon us to enter into a Consideration of our Ways, and without further Delay apply ourselves to *the keeping God's Commandments*;

IV. Let me, in the last Place, beg of you to consider the infinite Hazard we all run by neglecting this Work, upon Account of the great Uncertainty of our present

sent Lives. We have but such a determinate Term allotted to us for the doing our great Work in. And this Term, at the largest Computation, can extend no farther than the Time of our Lives. And yet is not this Time of our Lives infinitely uncertain? Are any of us sure we shall be alive a Month hence? Have we not almost every Day Instances presented to us of those who are snatched away by a sudden and unexpected Death? Have we not heard of a great many, who, in all Appearance, were as sound and healthful as ourselves, and dreamed no more of dying than we do now, who have yet almost in the twinkling of an Eye been carried off by an Apoplexy, or a Fever, or a Stroke of an Enemy, or the Assault of Robbers, or some other unavoidable Casualty? There are a thousand Ways to let out Life in a Moment; and it is not in the Power of the most sagacious Prudence either to foresee or to prevent one of them. Who then, that is in his Wits, will, upon the Presumption that he shall live many Years, nay, that he live many Weeks longer, put off a Business of such vast Concernment to him, that if it be not timely taken care of, he is utterly undone to all Purposes for evermore?

Give me Leave to dwell a little upon this Argument, and to press it upon you as warmly as I can, and that shall serve for my Application at this Time.

Since,

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Since, my Brethren, upon this short, this uncertain Life, depends our eternal Fortune in the next World, how infinitely doth it concern us to trifle no longer! Methinks the very Thoughts of this, that upon this single Point (for Life is but a Point, a Moment, in Comparifon of Eternity) depends our Life for evermore, fhould awaken the moft ftupid infenfible Man out of his deep Sleep of Carelefsnefs and Senfuality, to a quick and pungent Senfe of his everlafting Interests. Muft we be eternally faved or damned by what we do here, and is it not high Time for us to begin to look after our own Condition? Shall we let Day after Day, Year after Year, pafs over our Heads, and we all the Time think of nothing but the prefent? design nothing but juft how to live eafily here? nay, perhaps, only how to fpend that fingle Day which lies fo upon our Hands, that we are at a Lofs for the employing of it? Why, Fools that we are, our Sand runs on; it runs apace all this while that we are a doing nothing; and we know not how foon the Glafs will be out. And when it is out, Good God! what follows? Why, Eternity; a bottomlefs Gulph of Infinity; that which will never have an End; that which is never capable of a Change or Alteration. Can we think of this and fit ftill? Is our Day, that fatal, dreadful Day of Death, fo certainly, nay perhaps fo fuddenly, a coming, and can

Prov. 6.

10.

we live unconcerned? Can we fold our Arms, and say, *with the Sluggard, yet a little Sleep, yet a little Slumber?* Let us yet a little enjoy ourselves, and cast Care behind us? Why, methinks, the Sound of every Passing-bell should alarm us. We should not be able to hear that any of our Acquaintance, or any of the Neighbourhood, is carried off, but it should strike us to the Heart, and put us upon reflecting, *Lord, in what a sad Condition should I be, if this had been now my Case!* Whatever Company we were in, or whatever Business we had upon our Hands, whatever Designs of worldly Profit or Advantage we were a pursuing, or whatever Pleasures or Diversifements we had prepared to ourselves, yet, methinks, it should be sufficient to blast all these, and to spoil all the Content and Satisfaction we could expect from them, to have but such a Thought as this to come into our Minds; *Ay, this would be very well, if it would last always. But, alas! I must be gone, miserable Man that I am, I must be gone, and leave all these Things behind me: I must be gone to my long Home, where I must live for ever, either a perfectly happy Man, or the most wretched Creature in the World. And God knows which of them will be my Lot; I may prove the latter; I may experience what it is to live with everlasting Burnings. But as to the former, the State of Happiness, that I have made no Provision*

vision for, but have all my Work yet to do.
Oh, how killing and unsupportable is such a Thought as this! One would think that the Reflection upon it would keep us from giving any Rest to our Heads, or any Slumber to our Eyes, till we had made some Steps towards the securing our everlasting Concernments.

But, alas! we are not much given to think upon these Things; we are a trifling sort of Creatures, that love to put the evil Day far from us, and to enjoy the present. Let us live to Day; let who will take care of what comes after. Let us be rich; let us appear somebody in the World; let us live at Ease; let us enjoy ourselves and our Friends, and let Damnation, if it will, come at the Conclusion.

O foolish and insensible Creatures that we are! Is it thus that we employ our noble Faculties of Reason and Understanding? Is this the Use we make of all God's Kindness and Long-suffering, of all those Means he affords us for our Good? Yes, this. No better than this, to our Shame be it spoken. God, out of pure Kindness, gave us our Beings, and sent us hither for no other End, but that after a short and tolerably comfortable Life here, we should live with him in eternal Blessedness hereafter. Accordingly he has not been wanting in any Thing that might minister to these Purposes. He doth afford us Health, and
Strength,

Strength, and Reason, and Conscience, and Memory, for the carrying on this great Work. He orders all the Creatures of the visible World to be at our Service while we are a doing it. The Sun fails not to give his Light. The Earth fails not to yield her Fruits of Increase. The Beasts, the Fowls, the Fishes, the whole Creation doth daily minister to our Supports, and Conveniencies, and Delights: Nay, the Inhabitants of the invisible World think not themselves too good to attend upon Mankind, for the preserving them from their spiritual Enemies, and advancing this their great Work of Eternity. But, which is more than all this, God sends his own Son to live and to die for us. And the Gospel of his everlasting Salvation he hath taken Care shall be daily sounding in our Ears. We are told of our Faults, and we are directed into the right Way, and we are called upon continually to pursue it. The holy Spirit of God does daily sollicit and importune our Souls, as well by his holy Word and the outward Administrations of the Church, as by his inward Motions to remember what we were born to; and what God expects from us, and at least to yield up our Hearts and Lives to his divine Conduct, and to render ourselves happy, by an entire closing with God Almighty's most gracious Proposals: And lastly, to say no more, The Providence of God doth
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continually watch over us, and takes occasion, by the Actions, and Events, and Contingencies that happen to us almost every Day of our Lives, to put us in mind of our great Concernments; to check us in our foolish Career of Vice and Sin; to wean our Affections from their unreasonable Fondnesses to this World, and the Vanities of it; and to bring us to a true Sense of what we came hither for. All this God hath done, and doth daily for us. How now do we improve these blessed Opportunities? What Returns do we make to God for such unspeakable Mercies? Why, in truth, it is a very sad and melancholy Thing to give an Answer to this Question. Several there are among us, God be praised, that do make a right Use of these Blessings, and do seriously and carefully pursue an holy Life, in order to their eternal Happiness hereafter. And blessed of God be all such, and certainly for ever blessed shall they be of the Lord. But it must be confessed, that these are but few in Comparison of the Bulk of Mankind. The Generality of Men, I doubt, are of another Mind, and take other Measures.

Give me Leave to speak freely about this Matter. Some there are among us, who laugh and scoff at all those Things we are talking of; and look upon all this Business of another World as a made Story, for the frightening silly and timorous People. Very wife,

wife, and grave, and learned Men are they in the mean time. But I defy any of them to be able to arrive at this Depth of thinking or talking, till by a Course of Vice and Sensuality they have quite defaced the natural Principles of their Minds, and have scarce a Spark of Man remaining in them. Others there are, who make it their Business to keep their Heads continually hot with Drink and Company, that their Consciences may not be made uneasy, nor their Minds disturbed with such troublesome Reflections, as they certainly would be, if they were but suffered to cool, and had the Leisure calmly to reflect on these Things. Others, partly thro' Custom, and partly thro' their worldly Inclinations, have so fetter'd and intangled themselves with a Crowd of Business and secular Affairs, that that is always running in their Heads, nor have they Time to attend to any other Matters. And others among us are altogether immersed in brutish and sensual Lusts, and have no more Sense of any thing that is not Flesh and Blood, than Goats or Satyrs. Lastly, Others are rather silly and unthinking, than grossly wicked; they do believe these Things, and often with Reflection and Concernedness enough call them to mind. But, they do not know how, they are fatally overborn with something or other from seriously and industriously pursuing the eternal Welfare of their Souls,

Souls, tho' they are apprehensive enough how much it doth concern them. Their Comfort is, they mean well, and their Lives are not very bad; and they hope, some Time or other, they shall have the Grace to apply themselves closely to the Business of a religious, and serious, and devout Life; tho' at the present they cannot but own they lead a very careless one, having no Sense of God or Religion upon their Minds, as to their common Conversation.

This last Sort of People, now as they are (we thank God) the most in Number, so are they the most hopeful of any of those I have now named; and therefore to these chiefly do I at this Time apply my Discourse.

You believe there is a God and a Devil. You believe that there is a Heaven for pious and virtuous Persons to be rewarded in, and a Hell, in which all vicious and wicked Men shall be everlastingly punish'd. And you are sensible likewise, that, according to the Preparations you make in this Life, so shall you have your Portion in the one, or in the other: Nay, so far are you sensible of this, that you seriously think, some Time or other, of calling yourselves to account for your Life past, and reforming whatever is amiss in you, and making it your Business to live more strictly, and virtuously, and religiously, than ever you have yet done. Why all this is very well.

But

But why, in God's Name, do you defer it? Why do not you go about it presently? Can you consider, that upon your Behaviour in this Life depends your whole Eternity; and can you after this think it reasonable to neglect a Day longer the securing that infinite Concernment? What is it you do expect? Do you hope for clearer Revelations of God's Will in this Matter? or more powerful Assistances from his Spirit? Alas! it is in vain. God hath made his last Discoveries by Jesus Christ; nor are you ever to think of other Motives, or other Assistances, than what are made to you in the Gospel, and which you have had already some Experience of. And those too may fail you, if you do still continue to neglect or abuse them when God offers them to you. Do not deceive yourselves, God hath done all that is necessary; nay, all that is fit and convenient for his Part to do towards your Salvation. And if you will still harden your Hearts, and stand out against his gracious Tenders of Mercy, your Ruin will lie wholly at your own Doors.

But perhaps you may think you shall be fitter for that serious Work some Time hence, when you have dispatched some other Affairs, that your Hearts and Hands are now full of. But this I have already shewn you is a vain Imagination, it being certain, as I said, that every Day of your
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Life that you defer this Business, it will still grow more difficult, and you will be less able to undertake it. But after all, you do not consider that all this while you are demurring and putting off this Work, I say, you do not consider what little Command you have of your own Life. You are now in Health, and you think that by the Course of Nature you may live many Years. But what if you should not? What if you should die a Year hence, or a Month hence? (as it is odds but that several that now hear me will be gone to their long Home before another annual Revolution be come about.) Nay, what if, while you are saying to yourselves, with the rich Man in the Gospel, *Soul, take thine Ease, eat, drink, and be merry*, you should hear a Voice, saying, *O Fool, this Night shall thy Soul be taken from thee?* O, in what a miserable Condition would you then be! It is in vain then to begin your Work, for that is the Time it should be concluded. It is in vain to beg for longer Time, for the Decree of Heaven is passed upon you: you must go, though you be never so unwilling. If indeed you had any Art, any Skill, any Power to prevail with Death, or to oblige those, in whose Hands your Life is, to spare you, and give you longer Time, you would say something. But this you cannot do, nay, you know you cannot do it. You come hither upon the same Terms and Conditions that all

Luke 12.
19, 20.

all other People do. And you know that every Man's Life is at the Mercy of a thousand Accidents every Day.

Oh, Lord, then what intolerable Nonsense is it, to put off the greatest Business we have to do in the World, that Business, which, if it be not taken Care of, we are undone for evermore, in Hopes of the Continuance of a Life, which we are not certain, no, nor is it possible we should have any Certainty that it will continue for a Year; no, nor for a Month; no, nor for a Day. God Almighty give us Grace so to consider these Things, that we may all of us immediately *think of our Ways, and turn our Feet unto his Testimonies, that we may make Haste, and without further Delay, enter upon the keeping his Commandments.*





SERMON IX.

*Obligations to Godliness and Virtue,
from the Consideration of the Na-
ture of the Christian Calling, in
general and in particular.*

Preach'd before Queen Anne, 1709-10.

EPHES. iv. 1.

*I therefore the Prisoner of the Lord, beseech
you that ye walk worthy of the Vocation
wherewith ye are called.*



THAT is to say, You are, by
the great Mercy of God, called
to be Christians. I beseech you,
take Care that your Conversa-
tion be such as becomes that
Calling. God hath brought you out of the
Darkness of Heathenism into the Light of
the Gospel: It is fit therefore you should
walk as Children of the Light. You have

taken upon yourselves the Profession of a holy and pure Religion, which makes over to its Followers inestimable Privileges and Benefits. This is your Calling, your Vocation. Oh! let your Lives bear some Suitableness thereto. Let the Frame of your Minds, and the Tenor of your Actions, hold some Proportion with the Dignity and mighty Advantages of this high Calling in Christ Jesus.

This is that which the Apostle begs of the *Ephesians* here, and of all other Christians. And no Man living can say that he asks any thing but what is infinitely reasonable. It is the fundamental Law of universal Nature, that every thing should act according to its Kind; and it is the fundamental Law of the reasonable Nature in particular, that we should observe the Respects and Relations that Things have to Things, and the Congruities and Incongruities that arise from hence, and direct all our Actions accordingly. And whosoever in any Case acts contradictorily to the Person he sustains, or unsuitably to the Profession he makes, doth act absurdly and ridiculously; for he destroys the Propriety, and confounds the Relations of Things. In short, for a Man to be a Christian in Vocation, to own Christ for his Lord, and the Gospel for his Rule; and yet to live like a Heathen, or an Atheist, or a Worldling, or an Epicure, is such a Piece of
Unrea-

Unreasonableness, as no Apology can be made for.

But what is it that the Apostle would have us do? What sort of Conversation is it that he requires of us, when he bids us to *walk worthy of the Vocation wherewith we are called*? I answer, You yourselves, and every Man in the World, that understands what it is to be a Christian, is a competent Judge of that. Do but inquire of yourselves what the Nature of your Vocation is, what you profess in it, and what Benefits you expect from it, and you will need no Instructor, as to the sort of Life and Conversation *that is worthy of it*; nor indeed will you need any further Motives or Arguments to oblige you to put it in Practice. To assist you therefore in making these Inquiries shall be my Work at this Time. And here my Method shall be, First, To consider our Vocation in general, and to shew what the Obligations of that are.

2dly, To take notice of some Particulars in our Vocation, which will still add a further Force to the general Consideration.

I. I begin with our Vocation in general. And there the Query that I would propose to you to put to yourselves, is this: What sort of Life doth so clear, so full, so excellent a Discovery of God's Will for the Salvation of Mankind, as we have by Jesus

Christ, in Comparison of what the World had before; what sort of Life, I say, doth it require of all those who have the Knowledge of it? What kind of Life should that Man lead, who is called from Darkness to Light; from Ignorance of God, and of the Way of recommending ourselves to him, to a plain Revelation of his Will; from the Bondage of Death, to a certain Hope of a glorious Immortality; from a profane and impious Worship, to a holy, pure and reasonable Service? Will not Nature teach such a one, that in Proportion to those Advantages he hath above others, he ought also to be more exact and regular in his Life, more careful to approve himself to God, more studious of his Will, and more zealous and industrious in his Service, than other Men, who have not those Means or those Privileges? Yet this, my Brethren, is our Vocation, and therefore judge ye how *unworthy* we are of it, if it do not produce those Effects in us. Nay, judge ye whether this our Vocation will not turn to our unspeakable Misery and Punishment, if it be not attended with those Fruits. *If I had not*, says our Saviour, *come and spoken to them, they had not had Sin; but now they have no Cloak for their Sin.* There was something to be said for Men, who lived in the Darkness of *Gentilism*, who had no other Guide but the mere Light of Nature, and that too horribly darkned and obscured thro'

John 15.
21.

thro' that universal Degeneracy and Corruption of Manners that obtained all the World over. The *Times of this Ignorance* ^{Acts 17.} God might be supposed to *wink at*. Or if ^{39.} he would punish those Men for their Sins, yet it was to be hoped that he would do it lightly; and *because they knew not their* ^{Luke 12.} *Master's Will, and therefore did it not, they* ^{48.} *should be beaten only with few Stripes*, as our Lord expresses it. Nay, there was something also to be said in Excuse for those who lived a worldly, sensual, vicious Life, under the *Jewish* Dispensation, where, tho' they were in Covenant with God, and had his Laws and his Promises, yet both those Laws and Promises being in the Letter and outward Appearance of an earthly temporal Nature, and in a manner relating only to the Things of this Life, it might be presumed a hard Matter for them to raise up their Minds above this World, they seeming to want both Light and Encouragement to put them upon a vigorous Pursuit of Holiness here, or Happiness hereafter. Upon this Consideration, I say, there was something to be said in Apology for the *Jews*, tho' they lived not so purely and so virtuously as they ought to do. But for us who are under the Christian Dispensation, who have been instructed in the whole Will of God, and that by no less a Master than His own Son; who have the strongest Demonstrations in the World given us of

another Life after this, and the most explicit Promises that we shall be Partakers of it, if we be obedient to God's Laws, and have likewise the plainest and fullest Rules to direct us in that Obedience; so that none of us, how ignorant or how shallow soever we be in other Respects, yet, if we be honest, can possibly miss of our Way to Heaven; And lastly, who have all this made out to us with so much Clearness of Evidence, as will leave no Place for doubting in any reasonable indifferent Mind. I say, what can be said for us, if after having these great Opportunities put into our Hands of *entring into God's everlasting Rest*, any of us fall short thro' Disobedience or Unbelief.

Heb. 3.

Oh, happy we Christians above all Men in the World! if having these clear Discoveries of God's Will, and these inestimable Advantages that flow therefrom, we do embrace and entertain them, and improve and make that Use of them we ought to do, by leading a holy, pure, and heavenly Life. But certainly we are the most inexcusable wretched People under Heaven, if we do not: Much *better had it been for us*, as St. Peter speaks, *never to have known the way of Righteousness, than after we have known it, to depart from the holy Commandment delivered to us.*

Ep. 2.
21.

Oh,

Oh, my Brethren, to consider in how much Darkness all the rest of the World lies, and what a glorious Light shines forth to us Christians; to consider how little Hopes, or how little Means they have of everlasting Salvation, and how richly, how abundantly God hath furnished us with both; so that nothing is wanting to us, in order to our being everlastingly happy, but only our own Choice and Concurrence: How ought this Consideration to affect us! What infinite Thanks do we owe to our gracious God for these unspeakable Mercies! And how can we express these Thanks otherwise than by the Returns of a most hearty Love, and devoting ourselves entirely to his Service all the Days of our Life!

It is true, there are very few, if there be any, Nations in the World so barbarous, as not to be of some Religion or other. They do believe a God, and his Providence and Government of the World: Nay, the Generality of Pagan Countries at this Day do expect another Life after this, wherein good Men shall be rewarded, and wicked Men punished. But then these general fundamental Truths are so buried in an Heap of Errors, are so defaced, and the Force of them so much weakned thro' a Multitude of false and mischievous Principles that are mingled with them, that really the Condition of those Countries is very deplorable.

What shameful false Notions have they of God and his Perfections! What horrible Idolatry and Superstition is to be seen in all their Worship! How slenderly grounded is their Belief of another Life, and what odd kind of Fancies have they about it! What a World of Foppery and Nonsense is there in all their Divinity! How much are they in the dark touching the Will of God and the Way of recommending themselves to his Favour! and how various and fanciful, nay, how ridiculous, and often impious, are the Methods they have pitched on for this Purpose! Not to speak of the horrible Slavery they are in to the Devil, who exercises a most cruel Tyranny over them in abundance of Instances.

But, blessed be the God of Heaven, we Christians have none of these Difficulties, none of these Inconveniencies to struggle with. We have a holy and a pure Religion taught us by God himself; a Religion, that in all the Parts of it is worthy of God, and fitted to all the Necessities of Man. We have a Religion that teaches us to serve God in a Way suitable to his Nature and to our own, that imposeth nothing upon us but what is good and excellent in itself, and tending to the Perfection of our Natures, and to the Peace and Happiness both of private Persons, and publick Societies. We have a Religion that leaves us not to uncertain Guesses and Conjectures about a
future

future Salvation, but has given us God's exprefs Word and Promise for it, sealed by the Blood of his own Son, and confirmed by his Resurrection from the Dead, and taking Possession of the Kingdom of Heaven in our Behalf. We have a Religion that leaves us not to grope in the Dark how to get to that glorious Place where our Saviour is, but has described to us all the Way that leads to it so plainly, and withal given us such Notices of all the By-paths that may mislead us, that, if we be not extremely wanting to ourselves, we cannot fail of arriving thither. We have a Religion that recommends itself to our Reason and Understanding, in which there is nothing trifling, nothing absurd, and which the more any Man acquaints himself with, the more Satisfaction he will have concerning it. Lastly, we have a Religion, for which there is all the Proof, all the Evidence, that either Heaven or Earth can give for a Thing of this Nature. It is a Religion predicted by the Prophets; own'd several times by God's own Voice from Heaven; confessed by the Devils; established by an innumerable Multitude of Signs, and Wonders, and Miracles for a hundred Years together; attested by the glorious Resurrection of our Saviour from the Grave, and his visible Ascension into Heaven; confirmed by the Lives and wonderful Actions of a continued Succession of wise,

wife, and good, and divine Men, who have professed it; manifested by the Overthrow of the Devil's Kingdom in all Places where it got footing; and asserted by the Sufferings of ten thousand glorious Martyrs and Confessors, who have from Age to Age refused no Torments, no Cruelties of Death, to shew how firmly they believed it.

This now being the Case of the Christian Religion; and the Profession of this Religion being the happy and glorious *Vocation to which we are called* by our Lord Jesus, Oh, what Obligations do there lie upon us above all the rest of Mankind, to be serious in the Service of God; to be pure and unblameable in our Lives, and to abound in

Phil. 1. 11. *all the Fruits of Righteousness which are by Christ Jesus to the Praise and Glory of his Name!* And so to shew forth the natural genuine Fruits of so holy, so excellent a Religion! Oh, what manner of Persons ought

2 Pet. 3. 11. *we to be in all holy Conversation and Godliness!* Can there be any among us who

2 Tim. 2. 19. *names the Name of Christ, and not depart from all Iniquity?* Is it possible, that where so glorious a Light shines forth, there should be any such Men as Atheists, Sadducees, or Unbelievers? Any such Thing as Profaneness, Adultery, Whoredom, Drunkenness, Envy, Malice, Covetousness, or the like? Why these are the proper Fruits of the Heathen State, out of which Christ hath delivered us: And one would think that none of

of them should be found among Christians. These are the Works of Darkness, and fit only for such People where the Light of the Gospel never appeared, and who are the Vassals of Satan, and *led captive by him at his Will* and Pleasure; but no way becoming the Children of Light, who make Profession to believe in our Lord Jesus. But why do I talk of Christians? The Heathens themselves (as wretched as their Circumstances were) were many of them ashamed of such Practices, and therefore they shall be our Judges. Many of them, notwithstanding the great Darkness and Ignorance they lay under, notwithstanding the Multitude of ill Examples they had before them, yet have so preserved the Dignity of human Nature, as to keep themselves pure from those Crimes and Immoralities which I have now been speaking of. Nay, many of them, without any other Power than those of Nature, have, thro' the Blessing of God upon their Endeavours, not only learned to live free from all Taint of open Vice, but have been indeed Patterns of Virtue. Have been exemplary for Justice and Temperance, for Fortitude and Patience, for Fidelity and Truth, for Munificence and Liberality, for Moderation and Contempt of the World, for a publick Spirit and a zealous Love for their Country. Several such Instances are to be met with, not only among the antient
Greeks

Greeks and Romans, but among the modern *Indians* and *Japonefe*, and other barbarous Nations. Oh, how much more in this are they to be commended and applauded, than even some of us who pass among the better sort of Christians! (as Christianity now a-days goes.) But what an eternal Shame and Reproach is this to the Generality of us, who in good earnest are not to be named with many of the Pagans for true Virtue and Religion! Is this *to walk worthy of the Calling wherewith we are called?*

Tit. 2. 10. *Is this to adorn the Doctrine of God in all Things?* They, with all their Ignorance, and all their Errors in Matters of Religion, lived honestly, had a Sense of God and Virtue. A great many of us, with all our Light, all our Encouragements, all our Assistances, live like Brutes, like Men without God; Slaves to a thousand Follies, to a thousand Lusts and Passions: Nay, in truth, I am afraid that even a great many serious Men among us cannot think of several of the Heathens, such Men as *Socrates* and *Aristides*, such Men as *Cato*, and *Tully*, and *Seneca*, and a great many more such that might be named, without blushing for Shame that we come so very far short of them, having a thousand times more Knowledge in the Things of God, and more Means, and Encouragements, and Advantages for the improving ourselves in all sorts of Virtue, than they had. But let us not deceive our
selves,

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selves, *God is no Respector of Persons.* I Acts 10. 34
 heartily wish that those poor Heathens, of
 whom we generally have so mean an Opinion, may not one Day rise in Judgment
 against us Christians, and condemn us ;
 (not that I wish them ill, but I wish we
 were better) and that it do not come to
 pass what our Saviour once told the *Jews*, Matt. 8. 11, 12.
*That many shall come from the East, and
 from the West, and from the North, and
 from the South, and shall sit down with
 Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the
 Kingdom of Heaven ; when many of us, who
 are the Children of the Kingdom, shall be
 cast out into outer Darkeness, where there
 is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of
 Teeth.*

But it is Time to leave this Head, and
 to proceed. I have hitherto considered our
 Vocation in general, as it is the taking
 upon ourselves the Profession of the Christian Religion. And by this general Account I have given you of it, you may easily perceive what great Obligations are laid upon us Christians to lead holy, pure, and virtuous Lives above all the Men in the World. And how unworthy we are of our Vocation, and how contradictorily we act to it if we do not. But you will still be more convinced of this, if you will enter into a Consideration of the particular Things either done for you, or promised
 by

by you, in the taking this Calling upon your selves.

These therefore I shall now briefly touch upon, in order to the further shewing what kind of *walking is worthy of our Vocation*, and what Obligations we have upon us so to walk. And this is the second Part of my Discourse.

II. Now the Considerations I would propose are these following, which I shall put, as I did the former, in the Nature of Queries. And I beg of you that you will answer them to your own Consciences.

1. I beseech you consider what kind of Life should that Man lead, who, thro' the infinite Kindness of the Son of God, is rescued from the Jaws of Hell and Death; is redeemed from the Wrath of God, and the insupportable Vengeance of eternal Fire, which his Sins did justly call for; and this at no less a Price than that Son of God laying down his Life, and shedding his most precious Blood, that he might thereby make a Propitiation for us. This now is the Case of every Christian. And doth it become such a one, because he hath been pardoned so many and so high Provocations; I say, doth it become him to go on in his Sins? Doth it become him to take Advantage from the inexpressible Mercies he hath found, to multiply his Affronts against

against Heaven, that so, *because Grace hath* ^{Rom. 5. & 6.} *abounded, Sin may abound much more?* Oh, unnatural, wicked, blasphemous Inference! Sure every Man, who is sensible what it cost the Son of God to redeem Sinners, might have other Thoughts; and must rather argue thus, that since our dear Lord Jesus hath, at so vast a Price, obtained the Pardon of our Sins, and, by his calling us to his Service, hath given us a Title to that Pardon, we should, above all Things in the World, have a Care of new Scores, have a Care of again offending our God, and provoking his Displeasure against us. It is an unnatural Thing to reason otherwise; and whoever has any Sense of Ingenuity, cannot but look upon this astonishing Kindness of our Lord, in ransoming us with his Blood, as the greatest Obligation that could possibly be laid upon us, to renounce, to abandon, to hate with a perfect Hatred, all Sin and Wickedness in all the Kinds, and even in all the Degrees of it.

2. Again, Pray ask yourselves what kind of Conversation becomes that Man who hath solemnly dedicated himself to God; who hath publicly, and in the Face of the World, professed to renounce the Devil and all his Works, the Vanities of the World, and the Lusts of the Flesh, and devoted himself, both Body and Soul, as a living holy Sacrifice for ever to his Creator and Redeemer. And yet this is the Case of all
of

of us, who are made Partakers of the Christian Vocation. This Engagement we have all taken upon ourselves at our first entring into Christ's Religion, and most of us, to be sure, if not all of us, have several times renewed it. So that being thus solemnly consecrated to God and Christ, we are none of us at our own Disposol, but have entirely given up ourselves to God to be disposed of by Him. Oh, let us think of this, and then judge what kind of Conversation will be worthy of our Calling! Whether, being in these Circumstances, it will be possible for us, without the most horrid Perjury and Sacrilege, to allow ourselves in any known open Course of wilful Sin; nay, whether being thus devoted to God, we are not very false to our Engagements, if we do not make his Service, and the promoting his Interests, the great Business and Design of our Lives.

3. Be pleased to ask yourselves further, what kind of Life should that Man lead, who is called into the nearest Relation to God Almighty; who, from a Child of Wrath and Slave of Satan, is made the *Son of God*, the Brother of our Lord Jesus Christ, and a *joint Heir with him of the Inheritance of God*. Why certainly, upon the very first naming of this, it should come into every body's Thoughts, that a Person who is thus highly dignify'd, ought to have a great, and a noble, and a generous Soul,

Rom. 8.

17.

Soul, suitable to that Quality to which he is advanced, and becoming that illustrious Quality into which he is adopted. It should come into every body's Thoughts, that such a Person should think himself concerned above all Things, to behave himself in all the Circumstances of his Life bravely and worthily, and should take a World of Care that he did not by any base, mean Carriage of his, put a Disparagement upon that Alliance that he is honoured with. And yet this is the Calling to which we Christians are called. These are the Privileges that, by undertaking Christ's Religion, we are promoted to. We are the *Children of the most High*, and the *Son of God is not ashamed to call us Brethren*. We are made *Kings*, and *Priests unto God* our Father. We are *his Friends*, *his Favourites*, *his Chosen ones*; in a Word, *the Portion, the Possession, the Treasure of God* in this World. All these Titles are bestowed upon Christians by the inspired Writers. Oh therefore, let us consider these Privileges of our Calling, and then judge what kind of Conversation is worthy of it.

Luk. 6.35.
Heb. 2.11.
Rev. 5.10.
John 15.
14. 15.
Eph. 1.14.
1 Pet. 2.
5.9.

4. Pray ask yourselves likewise, what sort of Life he is to lead, who owns the Gospel of Christ for the Rule of his Actions, and by his very Calling hath engaged himself to the Practice of every Thing which is there enjoined. Whoever hath read the Gospel, knows what kind of Precepts it is

made up of, and must be convinced, that no Rules of Living, that were ever given to the World before, can pretend to come near it for Perfectness and Exactness.

There is indeed no great Strefs laid there upon any kind of Ceremonies or outward Observances. God never set any Value upon these in any Religion. But for the Things that are intrinsically good; for the Things that do really perfect and adorn human Nature; for the Things that do accomplish the Mind and Spirit of a Man: The Christian Institution, as it is set forth in the Gospel, is the highest, the noblest, the exactest, and withal the severest that ever was set on foot in the World. There all Sorts of Purity and Holiness, every Kind and every Degree of Virtue are recommended, and every Thing, that hath but the Appearance of Vice and Sin, is discouraged. There we are called upon to be *holy, as God is holy; to be merciful, as he is merciful.* There even our disorderly Desires and Appetites, tho' they do not break forth into outward Actions, are re-proved and discountenanced. And it is made a Sin not only to commit Adultery, to kill, or steal, or defraud our Neighbours of their Right, to do Injuries, or the like; but the very Workings of our Minds towards these Things (if our Consent be given to them) are declared culpable. As we must not commit Adultery,

1 Pet. 1.
15, 16.
Luk. 6.36.

so we must not look upon a Woman to lust after her. As we must not defraud our Neighbour, so neither must we covet what belongs to him. As we must not kill, so neither must we be angry without a Cause. As we must not do an Injury, so neither must we revenge one that is done to us. As we must not be ungrateful to our Friends, so neither must we hate our Enemies, but do them all the Good we can. And thus as to all the other Instances of our Duty.

Oh, holy Religion! Oh, just and excellent Laws! worthy to come from God, and worthy of our Lord Jesus Christ to promulgate, and most of all worthy of us to be observed. And therefore let every one, who names the Gospel of Christ, *walk worthy of this his Vocation*, by seriously endeavouring to bring all his Thoughts, and Words, and Deeds, throughout the whole Course of his Life, to a Conformity with the Laws there delivered.

5. And, in the next Place, pray ask your selves how that Man ought to live who professes in his Life to copy out the Example of our Lord Jesus. Our Calling, our Vocation, is to be the Disciples of Christ; and the very Notion of being a Disciple, is to frame our way of Living according to the Pattern that He, whom we call our Master, hath set before us. And therefore, as the Apostle hath told us,

if we pretend to be Christ's Disciples, we
 1 John 2. *ought to walk even as he walked.*
 6.

But now, if we take him for our Pattern, then we may easily know what kind of Conversation will be worthy of our Calling. If we call ourselves the Disciples of Christ, then we must be *humble, and meek, and lowly in heart*, for he was so in the greatest Degree, *Matt. xi. 29.* We must not be arrogant or assuming, but descend to the meanest Offices of Civility and Charity, for the Son of Man, our Lord and Master, *came not to be ministered unto, but to minister.*
 Matt. 20. 28.

We must think nothing below us, if we can thereby shew Courtesy to our Brethren, for the Author of our Religion and our Happiness did descend even to *the washing the very Feet of the Disciples.* We must be easy and gentle to all about us. Not easily provoked; and when we are provoked, ready to forgive the Injuries that are done us. For this was the Way of our Master; He was never known to be put out of his Temper by any Perverseness, any Impertinence, any Affront or Indignity that was offered him. He was gentle to all Men, patient under the greatest Sufferings, and so regardless of Injuries, that he not only forgave those who had the Malice to take away his Life, but he heartily *prayed for them.* He never sought himself, or his own Interests, in any thing he did, but only
 John 13.
 Luke 23. 34.

only the Glory of God. And can you then be called his Followers, who seek nothing but your selves in all your Designs and Actions? Who have no Regard to God's Glory, but only to what serves your Turn best in the present Circumstances? He was full of Tenderness and Compassion to all who needed his Help; nay, *he went about* Acts 10. 38. *doing Good*, it was the very Business of his Life. And can you think it becomes you his Disciples to be hard-hearted, and pitiless, and unmerciful, to be surly, or selfish, or covetous, to live uselessly and unprofitably in your Generations, when God has given you sundry Talents, sundry Means and Opportunities, whereby you may do a great deal of Good, and be very useful to others in the Place and Station wherein God hath put you? He, tho' he was as full of Employment as any Man, yet he constantly took his Times of Retirement from the World, and gave up himself to the spiritual Exercises of Prayer and Meditation, and Communion with God: Nay, Luke 6. 12. he sometimes spent *whole Nights in those Exercises*. And can you his Disciples pretend so much Business that you have no Leisure for your Devotions? Or can you live without any Sense or Feeling that you have need of Communion with God? And satisfy yourselves if now and then you put up a few, cold, formal, heartless Prayers to him? Our Lord was very contented and

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thankful,

Matt. 8.
20.

thankful, and heartily resigned to God, tho' he was very poor, and had not so much as *an House to put his Head in*. Can it then become any of you who are his Followers to be uneasy under your present Circumstances, or to repine at God's Dispenfations to you? Is it decent that you should be querulous or discontented at your Condition, when your Lord and Master, who had as little a Share of worldly Goods as any of you, was very thankful to God for whatever happened to him. Oh that all of us would make it a little more our Business to look into our Lord's Life, and observe how he behaved himself in all Emergencies! What kind of Life he led, and what Spirit and Temper he was of! We should then be more and more convinced how purely, how holily we ought to live, if we would walk worthily of our Vocation.

6. Pray ask yourselves further, what sort of Life he ought to lead, who by his Admission to this high Calling has such extraordinary Assistance from the Holy Spirit made over to him, over and above the Powers that Nature hath furnished him with. Every one, who is a Member of Christ, has from God a Promise of the Holy Ghost to assist him in the carrying on the Work of his Vocation. Nay more, our Saviour has given us his holy Spirit, not only to stand by us and support us, but also to be *in us*, as a Principle of Life, to dwell

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dwell within us, to take our Souls and Bodies for his Habitation. So that every true Christian may, in the most proper Sense, be said to be *a Temple of God*, a Tabernacle where the Holy Spirit is pleased to inhabit. 1 Cor. 3. 16.

Think now what is the natural Consequence we ought to draw from hence: Think what infinite Obligations are hereby laid upon us to keep ourselves holy and undefiled, both as to Soul and Body. Think how undecently we treat our sacred Guest whenever we give Consent to any wicked impure Thing. Lastly, think what glorious Things are expected from us, what excellent Attainments we ought to make in every Virtue and Grace, who have a divine Power so near us, nay within us, to strengthen us in all Difficulties, to support us under all Tryals and Temptations, and to carry us on, if we be not wanting to ourselves, to the most noble Undertakings and Atchievements.

7. Once more, and I have done. Pray ask yourselves what kind of Life should he lead who is called out of this World, and has his Name inrolled among the Citizens of the other World; who, by his Profession, declares himself *to be a Stranger* Heb. 13. *and a Pilgrim here, and to look for an abiding and continuing City, not made with Hands, eternal in the Heavens.* Doth it become such a Man to live, as God knows too many

Matt. 8.
20.

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of us do? To be so wholly intent upon the Business and Designs of this Earth, as if we were always to live upon it? To make it the Work of our Lives to be contriving and projecting for our secular Conveniences or Delights, and but now and then, at set Seasons, to lift up our Minds to God, and to attend the Concernments of our everlasting State? To be alarmed at every Thing; to be ruffled and discomposed at every Thing that threatens the Disturbance of our Pleasures, or the Diminution of our worldly Substance? I say, Can this be thought a Conversation that becomes a Man who bears the Character I have now given? Certainly, No: The farthest from it of all Things. He that hath laid up his Treasures in Heaven, should not be much concerned about the Treasures of this Earth. It becomes such a Man to sit loose from the World, and all the Vanities of it. He should just use it as a Man in a Journey doth an Inn, for his present Accommodation and Refreshment, but not to set up his Dwelling there. Heaven should be the Place to which all his Thoughts and Studies should tend. Thither should all his Designs and Pursuits be directed. And whatever became of him here, however it should please God to exercise him in this Life, whether by Poverty or Riches, Health or Sicknes, a splendid Fortune or low and mean Circumstances, all should be in a manner

manner indifferent to him, if he got but to Heaven at last.

This now, Brethren, is our Case. Here we are in the World at present, and we are allowed by our gracious God to serve ourselves of it, as to the Use of all the Things that tend to make our Abode here tolerably easy and comfortable. But Heaven is our Home: That is the Country we are in quest of, and for the Sake of which we took upon us the Profession of Christ's Disciples: *That is the Prize of our High-calling in Christ Jesus.* Phil. 3. 14. Would we therefore walk suitably to our Vocation? Let us mind *that*. Let us live like Men of another World; (as we profess to be.) Let God, and Heaven, and the Things above, have our Hearts, our Desires, our Affections, while this World hath our Bodies. By this means we shall not only secure to ourselves this everlasting never-fading Inheritance, which is the End of our Faith, and the Hope of our Calling; but we shall also make the best Provision possible for a happy Life even in this World; for Christ has solemnly promised us, that if we *first seek the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness all the other Things we need shall be added unto us.*



SERMON X.

*The Manner and the Circumstances of
the Day of Judgment.*

Preach'd before Queen *Anne*, 1710.

ACTS xvii. 31.

*He hath appointed a Day in which he will
judge the World in Righteousness, by that
Man, whom he hath ordained.*



THESE Words are a Part of that
Sermon which *St. Paul* preach'd
to the Men of *Athens*. The
Design of them, as you may
easily perceive, was to convince
the *Athenians* of the Necessity of leaving
their Idolatry and their vicious Conversa-
tion, and to persuade them to a hearty
Return to God, by a serious Repentance
and Faith in the Gospel ; and that from
this Consideration, that God had appointed
a Time in which he would call all Men to
account

account for their Actions past, reward the Good with everlasting Happiness, and punish the Wicked and Unbelievers with endless Torments.

And certainly there is no other Argument in the World so effectual for the persuading Men to quit their ungodly Courses, and to betake themselves to a serious, devout, religious Life, as this of the general Judgment, which shall come upon all Men at the End of the World. The other Arguments for Repentance, drawn from the Goodness of God, and the infinite Kindness of our Lord Jesus, in laying down his Life for us, and the Folly and Unreasonableness of all Sin in itself, and the ill Consequences that it brings upon us in this World: I say, these, and such like, tho' they are very strong in themselves, yet, God knows, thro' the horrible Corruption of human Nature, they have often no Effect upon us: Such Slaves we are to our Lusts, that for the Love of them we can make a shift to break through all these Considerations. But now, when a future Judgment and the Terrors of Damnation are laid before us, and pressed upon us, these do come so close to our dearly beloved Principle of Self-preservation, and so strongly work upon our Passions of Fear and Hope, which do most influence us, that, if they be seriously believed and considered, it is impossible for human Nature to

2 Cor. 5. 11. to resist them. *Knowing the Terrors of the Lord we persuade Men.* So saith St. Paul, in another Place, intimating, that if these do not persuade Men, nothing else can. These are the last Remedies to be applied to Mens Minds ; and if they be unsuccessful, their Case is desperate.

The Point therefore that I now mean to speak to, is the Manner and Circumstances of Christ's coming to judge the World, and the Proceedings of that Judgment, and the Consequences that will follow upon those Proceedings.

Now several very considerable Things our Lord Jesus Christ and his Apostles have discovered to us in this Matter, which are to be found interspersed in the Speeches of our Lord recorded in the Gospels, and in the Epistles of St. Paul and St. Peter, and the Revelations of St. John. These Passages therefore it shall now be my Business to collect into one View, and to reduce them under their distinct Heads, and to make such Reflections upon them as every Particular leads me to.

1. The first Thing I take notice of, as to the Manner and Circumstances of the Day of Judgment, which the Scriptures give us an Account of, is this, that it shall come upon the World suddenly and unexpectedly: Thus St. Peter, *The Day of the Lord will come as a Thief in the Night,* viz.

viz. without any previous Notice. It will surprize the World, when they think not of it, when they least expect it. And our Lord, speaking of that Day, acquaints us, that as a Snare it shall come upon all them Luke 21. that dwell upon the Face of the whole Earth. 35.

And in another Place he tells us, that as it Luke 17. was in the Days of Noah, so should it be 26, 27, 28, also in the Day of the Son of Man. They 29, 30. ate, they drank, they married, they were given in Marriage, until the Day that Noah entred into the Ark, and the Flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the Days of Lot, they did eat, and drink, they bought and sold, they planted and builded; but the same Day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained Fire and Brimstone out of Heaven and destroyed them all; even thus shall it be in the Day when the Son of Man is revealed.

Tho' in some of these Expressions our Saviour may seem to have Respect to his unexpected coming to destroy *Jerusalem*, yet the Words are not to be confined to that, as appears from the parallel Passage in *St. Matthew*; but do mainly and principally relate to his coming to the general Judgment: Of which his Judgment upon *Jerusalem* was both a Forerunner, and also a solemn Figure and Representation. And that is the Reason why our Saviour doth so often mix his Discourses of both these together.

Now

Matt. 25.
3. 5.

Now this sudden and unexpected Approach of the Day of Judgment, how ought it to affect our Hearts! how ought it to oblige us not to be taken unprovided at that Day! How will it astonish and confound us, if the *Bridegroom* should come, and we, like the *foolish Virgins*, are *fast asleep without Oil in our Lamps*.

Luke 12.
19, 20.

Oh what Amazement, what Horror will seize us, when, in the midst of our Diversions and Pleasures, or in the full Tide of our secular Business, when our Heads are full of other Designs, when we are promising to ourselves many fair Years of Happiness, and thinking that all will go well with us, all of a sudden to see the World falling in pieces about us, and ready to be buried in its own Ruins, and to hear the dreadful Trumpet summoning us to appear before our Judge to give an Account of all our Actions. Oh! it was a dreadful Word that was spoken to the rich Man in the Gospel, who, pleasing himself with the Happiness of his present Condition, said to himself, *Soul, thou hast much Goods laid up for many Years, take thine Ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But, saith God to him, thou Fool, this Night shall thy Soul be required of thee.* Surely great was the Horror, and bitter was the Agony that the Man was in when he heard this. But, alas! thus shall it happen to the greatest Part of the World at that Day. Let us all

all therefore follow that Advice that our Saviour gives us upon this very Occasion, *Let us take heed to ourselves, lest at any time* Luke 21. *our Hearts be overcharged with Surfeittings* 34. *and Drunkenness, and the inordinate Cares of this Life, and so that Day come upon us unawares.* Let us watch and pray always, v. 36. *that we may be accounted worthy to escape all those Things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.*

2. The second Particular which the Scripture acquaints us with concerning the general Judgment, is this; That the Earth shall then be set on fire, and that in the most terrible Manner imaginable. Whether this general Conflagration will happen upon Christ's coming to Judgment, or rather will be the last Transaction of the Judgment, the Scripture doth not declare. But that there shall be such a Conflagration, and that this Fire shall be for the everlasting Punishment both of the Devil and wicked Men, who will all be tumbled down into these lower Regions, which will then be a perfect *Lake or Sea of Fire* (as Rev. 19. 20. the Scripture expresseth it) is beyond all Doubt. To this Purpose let us observe what the Apostle says, *The Lord Jesus shall* 2 Thess. *be revealed from Heaven with his mighty* 1. 7. *Angels in flaming Fire, to take Vengeance of them that know not God, and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

But

But more expressely this Conflagration of the World is taught us in the 2d Epistle of c. 3. v. 6, 7. St. Peter, where the Apostle tells us, that as the World which was of old perished by an universal Deluge of Water, so the Heavens and the Earth which are now, are kept in Store, reserved unto Fire against the Day of Judgment and Perdition of ungodly Men. From whence it is plain, that at the Day of Judgment this World shall be set on fire, and that Fire shall be for the Punishment of ungodly Men. Furthermore, in the Verses following, he adds to the same Purpose, *The Day of the Lord shall come as a Thief in the Night, in which the Heavens shall pass away with a great Noise, and the Elements shall melt with fervent Heat; the Earth also, and the Works that are therein, shall be burnt up.*

v. 10.

If any one be at a Loss to conceive how the Heavens should be set on fire as well as the Earth, as St. Peter three times in this Chapter affirms they shall be, the Difficulty will be removed by considering that the Heavens here spoken of, are not those Heavens in which the Stars are, (in which Signification we commonly use that Word) but the sublunary Heavens, viz. those lower Regions of the Air, wherein are the Clouds and Vapours and other Meteors, which are here called the Elements, and in which Sense the Heavens are frequently taken in holy Scripture. Now these Heavens, together

ther with all that is in them, shall at that Day pass away with a crackling Noise of Fire, and the Earth, and all the Things in it, shall be put in Flames. *David tells* Ps. 11. 6. us, that *upon the Wicked God shall rain Fire and Brimstone, and an horrible Tempest; this shall be the Portion of their Cup.* And our Saviour intimates the same, when he tells us, as *in the Day when Lot went out* Luke 17. 29, 30. *of Sodom, it rained Fire and Brimstone from Heaven, and destroyed them all; so shall it be in the Day when the Son of Man is revealed.*

And now who can express the Horror and Confusion that shall be at that Day? Who can fancy so sad and dismal a Face of Things, as shall then be all the World over? Could we imagine ourselves to be present, when the whole Frame of Nature is upon the Point of Dissolution, and the whole World in Flames about our Ears, with what Terror and Amazement should we be filled? How would our Hearts fail us, *and our Joints be loosed, and our Knees smite* Dan. 5. 6. *against each other, unless we were sure we were in the Number of those who should be waisted up to meet the Bridegroom with Comfort? Oh, what will then become of all impenitent Sinners! What will become of all worldly, sensual, ambitious, voluptuous Men, who set up their Rest in this World, and mind nothing but their Ease, and the Gratification of their Appetites, or*

the Pursuit of their secular Interests! When they shall see all that they loved, all that they admired, all that they delighted in, gone, irrecoverably gone in a Moment! Lastly, What will become of all those bold profane Persons, who entertained all Discourses of a future Judgment only with Scoffs and Derision! Oh, how will they find themselves abused, and see, to their great Amazement, what they would never before believe, that *there is a Reward for the Righteous, that there is indeed a God that judgeth the Earth!*

But I pass on to the third Particular that the Scripture acquaints us with, as to this Day of Judgment, and that is this:

3. That when Christ shall come to judge the World, there shall then be a visible Throne or Tribunal erected in the Air, whereon he shall in Person sit as the Judge, attended with an infinite Multitude of the Heavenly Host. This is told us over and over again in the New Testament. Thus
- Matt. 25.
31. our Saviour tells us, *When the Son of Man shall come in his Glory, and all the Angels of God with him, then shall he sit upon the Throne of his Glory.* And St. John, in his
- Rev. 20.4. Visions of the general Judgment, tells us, that *he saw Thrones, and they sat upon them, that is, the Angels and Saints did; and Judgment was given unto them.* And besides these Thrones, *he saw a great white Throne,*

Throne, viz. a Throne of Light exceedingly magnificent and glorious; and he saw *him that sat upon it*, that is, our Lord Jesus; and so terrible was his Majesty, that, as he there tells us, *the Heaven and Earth did fly away before his Face.*

Furthermore, this Throne of Christ is expressly called his Tribunal or Judgment Seat, as when the Apostle tells us, *that we* Rom. 14. 10. Cor. 5. 10. *must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ.* Now that this Throne, this Judgment Seat shall be fixed in the Air, and the general Assize to be there held, which is another Thing I mentioned under this Particular, is clear from that Passage of St. Paul, where he saith, *The Lord shall descend* Thess. 4. 16, 17. *from Heaven with a Shout; and then, both those that are raised from the dead, and those that are alive and remain, shall be caught up in the Clouds to meet the Lord in the Air.*

Oh now, who can express, or who can conceive the exceeding Glory of this Majestick Appearance of our Lord Jesus, when he shall descend from Heaven with mighty Shouts and Acclamations, *with the Trumpet of God*, with an innumerable Company of glorious Angels, and shall seat himself upon his magnificent Throne, encircled with all those blissful Sons of Light! How will it surprize the best of Men! But oh, how will it confound the Wicked and Ungodly! If the Appearance of God upon Mount Sinai,

with the Thunderings and Lightenings which accompanied it, was so extremely terrible even to *Moses*, the Friend of God, Heb. 12. that, as the Text tells us, *he did exceedingly quake and tremble.* Or if *St. Paul*, before his Conversion, upon that little Glimpse he had of that glorious Light, wherein Christ shall appear at the last Day, was so astonished, that he fell down from his Horse, and lay as a dead Man: Oh, how shall they, who are the Enemies of Christ, who have highly offended and provoked him, and are conscious to themselves of what they have deserved from him, how shall they be able to abide his Presence at that Day, when the Gloriousness, and Majesty, and Terribleness of his Appearance will infinitely exceed all that the Tongue of Man can express, or the Heart of Man conceive?

4. Another Thing which the Scriptures assure us of concerning the general Judgment, is this; That then there shall be a personal Appearance of all Mankind before this Tribunal of Christ. *St. Paul*, in the Texts before quoted, tells us, *We must all appear, we must all stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ.* Our Saviour tells us, that before Him shall be gathered all Nations. And *St. John*, in his Visions of the Judgment, tells us, that *he saw the Dead, both small and great, stand before God.* And the Sea

Rom. 14.

10.

2 Cor. 5.

10.

Matt. 25.

32.

Rev. 20.

12.

Sea gave up the Dead which were in it; and v. 13. Death and the Grave delivered up the Dead which were in them, and they were judged every Man. And St. Paul, that the Lord i Thess. 4. shall descend from Heaven with a Shout, with 16, 17. the Voice of the Arch-Angel, with the Trumpet of God: and the Dead in Christ shall rise first; then we which are alive, and remain, shall be caught up together with them in the Clouds, to meet the Lord in the Air. From these Texts of Scripture put together, several remarkable Things may be gathered, viz.

(1.) In the general, that all Men and Women that ever have been, or are, or shall be in the World, shall, at the general Judgment, appear in Person before the Tribunal of Christ.

(2.) That, in order thereto, the Dead, as well those in the Sea as those in the Earth, shall, by the effectual Power of Christ, (going along with the Trumpet, which shall then sound) be raised up, and summoned to this general Rendezvous.

(3.) From hence likewise it may be gathered, that all Persons shall not die: But those that are living, when the Judgment comes, shall be caught up alive to *meet the Lord Jesus in the Air.* This is to be understood only of virtuous good Men, such as are the true Disciples of Christ, for to such only the Context restraineth it. The same Observation may also be deduced from that

1 Cor. 15. Passage in the 15th of the *Corinthians*, *Behold, I shew you a Mystery: we shall not all die; but we shall all be changed, in a Moment, in the Twinkling of an Eye, when the Trumpet shall sound.*

(4.) From which Text we further gather, that those good Souls that shall be then alive, and are to be mounted up into the Air, shall have their Bodies changed in a Moment, *i. e.* melted from a gross earthly Consistency, to a pure, subtle, spiritual Nature, so that they shall be of a Contexture and Temper suitable to those pure Regions where they are going to inhabit: *For Flesh and Blood* (such as we now have) is far too gross and impure to inherit the Kingdom of God, as the Apostle there expresseth it. And these are those *spiritual, incorruptible, immortal Bodies*, that he speaks of in that Chapter, and in several other Passages.

(5.) Lastly, from these Texts we observe further, that this general Appearance at the Judgment Seat of Christ shall not be all at once: But holy Men, they who are *dead in Christ, shall rise first*, and, together with those good People who are alive and remain, be carried by Angels with Joy to meet their Saviour. And after they have received their Sentence of Justification and Absolution, they shall sit with Christ, as his Assistants, in the judging of wicked Men and the fallen Angels; and then afterwards shall the

v. 24.

1 Theff. 4.

15, 17.

1 Cor. 6.

2, 3.

the Wicked be raised and brought to the Tribunal.

I cannot stay to make any Reflexions on these Observations, tho' they afford Matter for many curious and pious ones. But I proceed to the next Point.

5. That which follows upon this Appearance before the Tribunal, is the giving up our Accounts to the Judge. This St. Peter tells us: *We shall give an Account to him, who is ready to judge the Quick and the Dead.* And St. Paul, *We shall all stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, and every one of us shall give an Account of himself to God.* But of all other Texts this Particular is most lively set forth to us by our Saviour in the Gospel of St. Matthew, viz. in the Parable of the Master *that went into a far Country, and called unto him his Servants, and delivered unto them his Goods; giving unto one so many Talents, and to another so many, to every Man according to his Station.* And after a long Time the Lord comes home and reckons with them, and according to their Improvements or Abuse of those Talents doth he proportionably reward or punish every one of them. So shall it be at the Day of Judgment. The Lord of all the Families of the Earth will call every Man to account of his Management here upon Earth. He will enter into a severe Scrutiny how we have employed

1 Pet. 4. 5.

Rom. 14.

10, 12.

Matt. 25.

14. &c.

all those Talents that he hath entrusted us with. Then shall all the Powers and Faculties that have been given us, all the Favours and Benefits we have enjoyed, all the Means and Opportunities that have been afforded us for the living virtuously and holily, and thereby bringing Honour and Glory to our Master, be brought into our View, and an Account be demanded of them. He will account with us for our Senses, how we have employed them, whether to the Purposes they were given us for, the furnishing our Understandings, and the right governing of our Bodies, or whether we have made them only Instruments of Sin, and Inlets to Vanity. He will account with us for our Reason and Conscience, how we have employed them, whether we have done our best to improve them, and whether they have been faithful Guides of our Actions, or we have suffered them to be abused with Folly and false Principles, and to be led captive by our Lusts and Passions. He will call us to account for our Memories, how we have employed them, whether we have been careful to treasure up in them such Things as might be useful to our Lives, or have only made them the Repositories of Things idle, and impertinent, and unprofitable. He will call us to account how we have spent our Time in this World, whether we have employed it to good Purposes,

poses, in an honest laborious Pursuit of a lawful Calling, setting a due Portion thereof apart for the more immediate Service of God, and spending the Remainder innocently and wisely; or we have squander'd it away in Idleness, in Play, in Revelling, in impertinent or vicious Conversation, in the Neglect of our main Business. He will call us to account for the good Creatures he hath from time to time bestowed upon us for our Support and Refreshment, how we have employed them: whether we have used them thankfully, and soberly, with Temperance and Moderation, or we have abused them to Luxury and Excess, to Gluttony or Drunkenness, making there-
with Provision for the Flesh to fulfil the Lusts thereof. Rom. 13.
14 He will call us to account for our Learning and intellectual Accomplishments, for the Advantages of our Education, for our Health and Strength, for our Wealth and Riches, for our Greatness, Power, and Reputation, and all those special and eminent Talents that he hath entrusted us with above others, how we have employed them, whether we have made them Instruments of doing a great deal of Good, and being eminently useful in our Generation, or they have only ministred to Pride, and Vanity, and Self-pleasing, if not to the worse Purposes of Vice and Wickedness. Lastly, He will call us to account for all the Opportunities of Grace and Means
of

of Salvation which we have enjoyed ; for all the good Counfels and wife Exhortations that have been given us ; for the Revelation of his Son that hath been made known to us ; for the Use of his Word and Sacraments ; for all the Motions and Suggestions of his holy Spirit within us, dissuading us from Sin, and alluring and solliciting us to a Course of Virtue and Holiness : For all these, I say, he will call us to account how we have employed them ; whether we have improved them to the Purposes they were given for, as we should have done ; whether we have grown in Grace, and brought forth Fruit suitable to so many Helps and Advantages, or have been idle

Matt. 25.
30. and *unprofitable Servants*. These, and a great many other Things, which we now scarce think of, shall we be accountable for to the Judge at that Day. And then shall all our Actions, good or bad, the most secret as well as those that were publick, be inquired into. Then shall all the Intents, and Thoughts, and Designs of our Hearts be reveal'd and thoroughly scann'd ;

Rom. 2.5. for this is the *Day of the Revelation of the righteous Judgment of God*. Then shall the Wisdom and the Justice of the divine Providence appear eminently to all the World,
Matt. 16.
27. in *rewarding every Man according to his Works*. In vain will it be then to expect Favour, any otherwise than as we have laid the Grounds for it by our Repentance
in

in this Life; for we are then before an impartial Tribunal. In vain will it be for us to think of shuffling and evading; for however we may by our Artifices blind the Eyes of Men in this World, yet we have one to deal with then, who can easily see thro' all our Shifts and Disguises. In vain will it be to endeavour to conceal any Thing at that Day, for *all Things are naked and open to the Eye of him with whom we have to do*: Nay, then our Consciences will be as a thousand Witnesses, either for the acquitting or condemning us; and will bring to our Remembrance the whole Series of our Actions, as fresh as if they were but newly done. All those Sins which we here made it our Business to forget as soon as we could, shall then, with all their aggravating Circumstances, be set in order before us. Nay, then shall all our Actions, even those that we are most ashamed of, those that we always used the greatest Care to conceal from the Knowledge of others, be exposed to the View of the whole World. Our Hearts shall then be laid open, and Angels and Men shall see what Principles and Designs they were that influenced our Actions. This the Scripture fully assures us of, telling us, that when God comes to judge the World, he will both bring to Light the hidden Things of Darknes, and will make manifest the Counsels of the Heart. And in another Place,

God

Heb. 4. 13.

1 Cor. 4. 5.

Ecclef. 12. *God shall bring every Work into Judgment,*
 4. *with every secret Thing, whether it be good,*
or whether it be evil.

6. But I hasten to the last Particular which the Scripture acquaints us with concerning this Matter; and with it I shall shut up this Discourse: and that is, the final Sentence that shall follow upon this Examination and Discovery of all Actions, and the Execution of that Sentence. This Sentence is two-fold, according to the two different States of Men that shall be found at that Day; viz. the Sentence of Absolution, and that shall be pronounced upon all the Godly; and the Sentence of Condemnation, and that shall be pronounced upon all the Wicked, and upon the apostate Angels. Both these we have fully declared in the 25th of St. Matthew so often mentioned; *The King shall say to them on the right Hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the Foundation of the World.* And then follows the Sentence of Condemnation a little further; *He shall say unto them on the left Hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting Fire, prepared for the Devil and his Angels.* And then, in the last Verse, follows the Execution of both these Sentences, *These shall go away into everlasting Punishment, but the Righteous into Life eternal.*

Oh!

Oh! the infinite and inexpressible Horror, and Confusion, and Anguish, and Despair, that will seize upon all wicked and ungodly Persons when this shall come upon them. When they shall hear the Judge pronounce that terrible Sentence, and at the same time find themselves drag'd away to suffer it in Extremity, *Depart from me ye cursed.* Oh, dreadful Words! Depart from him who is the Life of our Lives! and without whose Presence and comfortable Influence, it is infinitely more desirable not to be at all, than to live and have the whole World. Time indeed hath been, when they have often bid God to depart from them; when they desired nothing more, than to keep as far from him as they could, and endeavoured nothing more, than that he should not be in their Thoughts. But they will not always be abused and cheated with these false Notions. They will then be awakened, and their Understandings will faithfully represent to them what an unspeakable Loss it is to be deprived of the Presence of God. They will then see clearly (tho' too late) what a mighty Happiness the Saints enjoy, in loving, in adoring, in admiring his infinite Majesty, and in being filled with the Sense of his Love, and enravished with the perpetual Emanations of his Goodness. They will then find, that to depart from God is to be miserable in the highest Degree,

gree, is to lose all Pleasure, all Comfort, all Peace, all Hopes of these Things for ever ; to be exposed to the gnawing of a Worm that never dies ; to be let loose to the Whips and the Stings, the Rage and the Fury of a deeply sensible, and too much enlighten'd Conscience. But this is not all, tho' it be sad enough : To their Affliction for what they have lost, what they are deprived of, shall be superadded an exquisite Pain to their very Senses ; that their Torments may be every way compleat, Depart from me, ye cursed, *into everlasting Fire.* What more terrible to Flesh and Blood than Fire ? But to be tormented in everlasting Fire, in Fire unquenchable, who can bear the Thoughts of it ? For those tender Limbs of theirs, which they now use with so much Delicacy, to be henceforward stretched out upon a Bed of Flame : For those Palates of theirs, which they are now so careful and curious to gratify, to want hereafter a Drop of Water to cool the insupportable Heat of them : For them, who in this World minded nothing so much as the living at their Ease, and enjoying their Pleasures, from henceforth to dwell with everlasting Burnings ; to be tumbled down into a Lake that burns with Fire and Brimstone for ever : Oh, how amazing, how intolerable is the very Consideration ! Especially when we consider what Companions, what Comforters they
are

are likely to have in this their Misery, even no better than the damned Fiends. Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting Fire, *prepared for the Devil and his Angels.* These indeed are their proper Territories; this Lake of Fire was principally designed for them, for their first foul Rebellion against God. But God Almighty intended Mankind for better Fortunes. But since they (those I mean of whom I am now speaking) wilfully forsook their heavenly Father, and made themselves the Servants of the Devil, his Slaves they shall be to all Eternity; and he will pay them their Wages for all the Drudgery they have so faithfully done him. But, alas! no otherwise, than by adding Vinegar to their Wounds, by reproaching their Folly, and increasing their Torments, and making Hell, if it be possible, more insupportable than it is.

Oh now, who can conceive the sad Condition of those poor forlorn Creatures! Who can number the Groans and the Plaints, the Roarings and the Howlings, the Curses and Imprecations, which, out of the Anguish of their Souls, they do continually belch out against God, against themselves, and against all the World! Oh, how they do curse their own Folly and Madness! How bitterly do they reflect upon their past Lives! How do they wish that they had thought on these Things in
time!

time ! What would they not give for one Day, one Hour, of all that precious Time that they have lavished away so foolishly, that, if it were possible, they might make their Peace with God, and even grow to the Ground in humble Supplications for his Mercy and Forgiveness ! But, alas ! it is too late ; the irrevocable Sentence is past ; their eternal State is concluded ; never, never must they hope to change their Condition ; and this they know. And this is that which every Moment adds new Torments to their Torments. Oh, that we, who now hear these Things, would seriously consider them ! Now, while God affords us our Lives, and the Means of Salvation, and the Hopes of his Favour. And Oh, that we would consider them so long, till we be effectually wrought upon to change our Course of Living (if we do not already live as we should do) and apply ourselves to a serious and diligent Pursuit of Holiness and Virtue, that we may never come into this Place of Torment ! But when our Lord shall come to judge the World, we may be found in the Number of the *Sheep on his right Hand*, upon whom he will pronounce that happy Sentence of Absolution, *Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the Foundation of the World.*

Oh blessed, beyond all Imagination blessed, are those happy Souls to whom these Words shall be pronounced! How abundantly will they think themselves rewarded for all the Troubles they here endured; for all the Pains they took in the Ways of Virtue and Piety; for all the Scoffs they met with from profane, irreligious, atheistical Men, who laughed at their Preciseness (as they called it) and their Zeal for God and Religion!

Their Time of Trial is now past, and now they come to be crowned. Now do they mount up with Jesus their beloved Master, and *with an innumerable Company* Heb. 12. *of Angels, and with all the Spirits of just* 22, 23. *Men made perfect, into the New Jerusalem:* Into blissful Regions, into a Country of perpetual Light and Peace, where there is no Darkness, no Mists or Storms to which this under World is always obnoxious; *No need of the Sun or Moon to shine in it,* Rev. 21. *for the Glory of the Lord doth lighten it.* 23.

Here is the *City of the great King*: The Seat of the Majesty of Heaven. Here shall they live in his Presence, and be in the Number of his Favourites, and behold the Wisdom of his Government, and the admirable Contrivance of all his Works. Here shall they be ravished with the *Beauty of his Holiness*, and the Brightness of his Understanding, and the Largeness of his Love; his uncorrupted Justice, and his infinite

unexhausted Goodness. Here shall they love him and their Saviour as much as they are able, and they shall still be able to know him, and to love him more and more. For all their Faculties will be enlarged, and grow so capacious, that they will bear some Proportion to that infinite Good which is to fill them. In a Word; Here shall they spend a whole Eternity in an Exstasy of Joy, in an uninterrupted Succession of Pleasures, in the best natured and most agreeable Company in the World; Angels, and Arch-Angels, and Prophets, and Apostles, and Martyrs, all their dear Friends and Acquaintance, who die in the Faith of Christ, and in the Fear of God; and all those brave Souls likewise whom they have heard or read of, whose Virtue and rare Actions have made them famous over the World. And the Employment of the whole glorious Society shall ever be to love, and to serve one another as much as ever they can, and all to join together in singing
 Rev. 7. 10. *endless Praises and Hallelujahs to him that sitteth upon the Throne, and to the Lamb for evermore.*

I can say no more. We are lost if we go further. O Thou *Blessed God, who hast prepared for them that love thee, such things as pass Man's Understanding, pour into our Hearts such Love towards thee, that we, truly repenting of our Sins, and quitting all the Paths of Folly and Wickedness, whereby*
 we

Ser. 10. *Day of Judgment.*

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we have gone astray from thee, and seriously endeavouring to keep all thy holy Commandments, and thereby shewing that we love thee above all Things, *may at last obtain those heavenly Promises of thine, which exceed all that we can desire:* And when our Lord shall come to judge the World, *we may be found acceptable in his sight.* Amen.



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SERMON XI.

About religious Resolutions. The great Caution that should be observed in making them.

Preach'd before Queen Anne, 1711.

JOSHUA xxiv. 21.

And the People said unto Joshua, Nay, but we will serve the Lord.



ch. 23. v.

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v. 2. c. 24.

v. 1.

THE Occasion of these Words was this: Joshua having brought the People of Israel into a peaceable Possession of the promised Land, and being now grown old, and ready to leave this World, as the last and greatest Kindness he could do for that People, He calls together all their Elders, and their Heads, and their Judges, and their Officers, which represented them, in order

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to the entring them into a strict Covenant, that they should give themselves up to the Service of God. Being met together, he makes a Discourse concerning the great Things that God had done for them. He sets before them, *how that whereas their* ch 24. 2. *Forefathers had been Idolaters on the other side of the Flood, God, in Mercy to them, singled out Abraham their Father, and brought him into the Land of Canaan, and taught him the true Religion, and multi-* v. 3. *plied his Seed. And after many Kindnesses shewed to their Predecessors, he had brought* v. 5, 6, 7. *them out of the Egyptian Slavery by a mighty Hand and stretched-out Arm: Had led them marvelously through the Wilderness, and had now at the last, by his (viz. Joshua's) Conduct, brought them safe into* v. 8.—13. *a Land flowing with Milk and Honey: Notwithstanding all the Strength and Policy that the neighbouring Nations had used to hinder their Passage, and all the Power that thirty and two Kings within the Land could make for the destroying of them.——Wherefore having such great Obligations laid upon them by God, such as never any Nation before them had, they were wondrously ungrateful to their great Benefactor, if they did not yield up themselves intirely to his Service, if they did not* v. 14. *fear the Lord, and walk before him in Sincerity and Truth, and put away the strange Gods which their Fathers had served. This*

is the Sum of the first fourteen Verses of this Chapter. But, continues he in the 15th Verse, *If it seem evil to you to serve the Lord, chuse you this Day whom you will serve; whether the Gods which your Fathers served that were on the other side of the Flood, or the Gods of the Amorites in whose Land ye dwell: But as for me and my House, we will serve the Lord.* As if he had said, It is not my Purpose to do any Violence to you, or to force your Inclinations. You have heard my Arguments. I leave it to you, whether you will be persuaded by them. You your selves must chuse whether you will serve the Lord, or serve other Gods. But I declare to you, whatever you pitch upon, it is my Resolution, that I and my Family will serve the Lord, and him only.

The People, as appears in the two next Verses, were perfectly convinced by his Discourses, acknowledged the Obligations they stood in to the Lord, and were so sensible of them, that they cried out, *God forbid that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other Gods.* But *Joshua* thinks fit to try them further: He would not have them ensnared into Resolutions, but would have them seriously to consider to what severe Things they obliged themselves, if they determined their Choice to the Service of God. To this Purpose he tells them, *Ye cannot serve the Lord, for He is*
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an holy God, a jealous God: He will not forgive your Transgressions nor your Sins. If ye forsake the Lord and serve strange Gods, then he will do you hurt and consume you, after that he hath done you good. But the People were not discouraged by this, but stood to their first Determination, and with one Voice cried out in the Words of the Text, *Nay, but we will serve the Lord.* v. 21, 24.
 This was their last Resolution; and upon this *Joshua* made them that Day enter into a Covenant with the Lord. v. 25.

I doubt not but a great many here present are so well inclined to the Service of God, that they are ready to make the same Declaration, to take up the same Resolution, that the *Israelites* here did. They are so sensible of the Folly and mischievous Consequences of a sinful Life, and the infinite Obligation that God hath laid upon them to live virtuously and religiously, that they do fully purpose, with the Grace of God, to quit all their evil Courses, and to devote themselves to God's Service; to forsake all the Idol Gods which the Men of the World worship, and which they renounced at their Baptism, and, as *Joshua* here words it, *to walk before the Lord* (the remaining Part of their Days) *in Sincerity and Truth.* I say, I doubt not but a great many among us are ready to make such Resolutions as these. And, to be sure, whenever they come to the holy Sacrament,

they do actually make them. May God Almighty bless and prosper all such as are thus religiously disposed; all such as can thus say with the *Israelites*, *Nay, but we will serve the Lord.* But this it is fit they should be forewarned of, which *Joshua* insinuates to the *Israelites*, that it is a much easier Matter to make Resolutions about serving God, than to perform them after they are made. And consequently they, who mean to have their Resolutions come to any Effect, will be extremely concerned both to use their utmost Prudence and Consideration in the forming of them, and their utmost Care and Diligence in the keeping them afterwards.

These are the two Points upon which the Success of our pious Desires and Endeavours doth all in all depend. For which Reason I think I cannot do better Service to well-disposed Persons, than to offer something for their Assistance and Direction in both these Matters.

Two Things I shall endeavour at this Time.

First, To shew what Rules are to be observed by us in the framing our good Resolutions, And,

Secondly, What Things are to be taken care of after we have framed them, that they may produce real Effects.

I begin

I begin with the first Point, *viz.*

I. The Rules that are to be observed by us in making our Resolutions. They are these Five following:

1. That a Man thoroughly consider the Matter he resolves upon, and of the Arguments that may be urged for and against it.
2. That he consider likewise his own Temper and Humour when he doth resolve.
3. That he make his Resolutions as particular as may be.
4. That he not only resolve upon the End, but upon the Means likewise of attaining that End.
5. That he be prudent in his Resolutions, and do not burden himself with unnecessary Things.

Of these five Particulars as briefly as I can.

1. The first Rule is, that we thoroughly consider of the Matter we resolve upon, and of the Arguments that may be urged for or against it. This, you see, was the Method that *Joshua* took with the Children of *Israel*; when he had a Mind to fix them as firmly as was possible to the Service of God. He laid before them the Difficulty on both Sides of the Question, and then bid them chuse *whom they would serve*. Before he would enter them into this Covenant, he
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lays the Matter impartially before them; and as on one Side he represents to them the infinite Obligations they had to engage themselves to God's Service, and the mighty Advantages they would receive from it; so on the other Side he sets before them the Difficulties they must expect to encounter if they did engage in it, and that both upon Account of the great Strictness it required, and of the heavy Judgments they brought upon themselves if they were false

v. 19. to their Vows: *Ye cannot, says he, serve the Lord; for he is a holy God, a jealous God: He will not pardon your Transgressions nor your Sins.* Now when he had laid this Matter before them, he leaves it to

v. 15. them to determine themselves: *If it seem evil unto you (says he) to serve the Lord, chase you this Day whom you will serve; whether the Gods which your Fathers served on the other side the Flood, or the Gods of the Amorites in whose Land ye dwell.*

Now thus we must deal with ourselves, if ever we mean to make firm Resolutions about any thing. It is the Fault and the Infelicity of a great many, that they take up Resolutions upon the Consideration of a very few Particulars. They chuse their Side before they have attended to what may be said on the other Side. Now tho' they happen to chuse the right Side, yet, when afterwards something comes to be fairly represented to them to the Disadvantage of it,

it, which they never considered or thought of before, it often falls out that they are wholly surprized and at a Loss; and if the Resolutions they have taken up, prove to be against the Grain of their former Customs or Inclinations, it is ten to one but they fall to nothing, and Nature will have its Course, tho' possibly the Difficulty that occasions their Relapse, is very inconsiderable and easily answered.

It may be you have spent some Time in considering the unexceptionable Reasonableness of Virtue and Religion in general, and this hath made great Impressions upon you; especially you are affected with the many Comforts and Conveniencies both as to Mind, Body, and Estate, that it is attended with in this World, besides the vast unspeakable Rewards which are promised to all those, who practise it, in the World to come. Upon these Considerations you set up your Resolutions. You will forsake all your vicious Courses; you will live virtuously, and serve God heartily, ay, that you will. But this is but one Side of the Case that you have represented to your selves. Have you on the other hand considered the Pains and the Uneasiness that this Course of Life will put you upon; especially at the Beginning, and in case you have been heretofore engaged in a contrary Way? Have you thought what it is *to cut off a right Hand, or to pluck out a right Eye* Mat. 5. 29 and 18. 8.

Eye (as our Saviour expresseth it) ? What it is to live in a Contradiction to your most natural Inclinations, and to debar your selves of those Things that you now most love and hanker after ? Besides, Are you provided to answer all those Objections and Arguments which will on every Side be made use of to divert you from the Course you are undertaking ? The Question will, without doubt, be put to you, What Certainty you have of the Truth of this Religion that you make such a Stir about ? Nay, whether it be not probable, that all the Business of Rewards and Punishments in another World is but mere Talk and Noise, the Invention of the Priests or Statesmen ? Is your Faith now strong enough to bear up against these Assaults ? Further yet ; It may be, it will be insinuated to you, that you need not take so much Pains, or lead a Life of such Strictness, and Regularity, and Devotion, as you aim at, but that you may go to Heaven without all this ado ; How now are you prepared to repel these Temptations ?

But if these Things do not divert you, Are you sure it is not above your Strength and Ability to go thro' this Work after you have undertaken it ? Is it in your Power, think you, if you should seriously endeavour it, to get such a Mastery over your Passions, and to live a Life of such Temperance,

perance, and Chastity, and Humility, and Charity, and Resignation to God, as your Religion will oblige you to? But admitting that nothing of this discourages you, Are you sure, in the last Place, that you are Proof against the many outward Difficulties and Discouragements that possibly may be thrown in your Way upon Account of your Religion? For it is not always Sun-shine in this World with pious Men, tho' for the most part it is. Times have come, and may come again, when the best Treatment you will meet with for your strict Profession of Religion will be the Derision, and Reproaches, and Persecutions of all about you. Thus it fared with our Saviour, and with the best of his Disciples for some Years together. How now are you armed, how are you prepared against these Attacks? It is impossible you should be to any Purpose, unless you have well thought of them before-hand. But if you have considered them, and yet find your Resolutions firm and unshaken, it is a good Sign they are rightly made. On the contrary, if you have not considered them, it is to be feared your good Purposes may fail you in the Hour of Temptation; and you will meet with no better Success in your Undertaking, than that foolish Builder in the Gospel, that our Saviour speaks of, who began *to build a Tower*, but *did not sit* Luke 14.
down first and compute the Charges it would 28.
put

v. 29. put him to, and whether he had Ability to support them; but laid the Foundation at adventure, and afterwards was not able to
 v. 30. finish it. So that all who beheld it began to mock him, saying, This Man began to build, but was not able to finish.

2. But, secondly, as we ought to have a particular Consideration of Things themselves, so also ought we to have of our own Humours and Tempers when we are a making good Resolutions. By not attending to this, a Man is often deceived in his devout Purposes, taking those to be firm and sincere ones, which really are not so. We are not always equally capable of religious Impressions, but are much better disposed for them at some Times than at others. A good Book, or a warm Discourse, may often put a Man into a strange devout Frame, and then he can resolve any thing; but when he is cool again, he has forgot all. A sharp Affliction likewise, or a Fit of Sickness, or the Apprehension of any sudden Danger, doth often make us wonderful serious and sensible of our Follies past, and full of good Purposes to change our Course of Life. But then these Purposes and Impressions do usually vanish with the Things that caused them; when the present Apprehensions and Terrors are over, we are the same Men that we were before. Nay, even a Man's Sins, and the full Gratifications of his Lusts, will naturally work
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in him a present Detestation of them. Having newly satisfied his Appetites, all his Desires and Expectations are over, and the Man is cloyed, and then he begins to reflect upon the Vanity and Sinfulness of such kind of Courses, and he resolves to be guilty of them no more. But this lasts but for a short while; as his usual Temper and Temptations return, so the same Appetites return with them, and they must again, in spite of his late Resolution, have their usual Satisfaction. It is no wonder that all the Resolutions that are made in such Circumstances as these, prove generally very idle and insignificant. For the Man is not himself when he makes them. He is in a preternatural State: He is in the Heat and Transport of a Passion. If he will resolve to Purpose, he must resolve in cold Blood, as well as when he is heated by some extraordinary Occasion.

Never therefore let any one trust to his pious Resolutions, unless he have tried how they appear to him, how he approves of them, how they fit his Mind in all kind of Tempers and Humours. It is in this Case as it is in Matters of Sense; there are some Objects which, if you look upon only in one kind of Light, you will hardly avoid your being mistaken in your Judgment about them. As you must put them into all their various Postures, so must you view them in all sorts of Lights, if
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you mean to form true, steady Ideas of them.

I am not indeed at all for discouraging those devotional Fits (as I may call them:) on the contrary, I would have every one do their Endeavours to raise up themselves into that Temper as often as they can. For such sudden Heats do really sometimes prove the Beginnings of a lasting Virtue. They are the Occasions that put a Man upon thinking. And the Impressions that are then left upon his Spirit (if there be due Care taken to cherish and preserve them) may be effectual, by the Grace of God, for the new modelling his Mind, and quite altering the whole State and Frame of his Life. But this I say, If we mean that our Resolutions should be pertinent, and not vanish like the Morning Dew, we must not think it sufficient to resolve in a Fit or an Humour, but we must, when we are cool and sedate, and the accidental Violence is off from our Spirits, review our Resolutions, and canvas them over and over again. And if we then find ourselves to approve of them, and in all Tempers, and Dispositions, and Circumstances, have the same Earnestness, and Desire and Vigour of Mind to pursue them, it is a good Sign that they were well formed, and that we shall proceed prosperously in them.

3. But another Thing fit to be observ'd is, that we do not content ourselves with resolving in general, but that our Resolutions be as particular as may be. It is not enough to make our Purposes in the Gross; to say, as the *Israelites* did to *Joshua* upon the fore-mentioned Occasion, *Nay, but we will serve the Lord*, we will be good, we will break off our Sins, and enter upon a new Course of Life: Alas! all this is but shooting at Rovers. If we mean to hit the Mark, we must take more particular Aims. He who thinks to get the Mastery over his Sins and evil Habits, only by making general Resolutions against them, is just like the Man who hopes to be victorious in the Fight he is engaged in, merely by making a general stout Resistance against his Enemies, tho' he bestow all his Blows at random, neither attending to the Advantages that are offered him, nor regarding the Disadvantages to which he himself must lie open. It will therefore concern us, when we are framing Resolutions, to live a holy Life, to examine well the State of our own Souls: To see where we are weak, and obnoxious, and where we are pretty well able to defend ourselves, and accordingly to make Provision. To enquire what particular Sins our Temper, or our Education, or our Business, or our evil Customs do most incline us to, what are the most reigning Lusts and Vices in us, and to fortify our Minds most particularly

against them. Do we find that Worldly-mindedness, Covetousness, or the Distrust of God's Providence, is the prevailing Sin that enslaves us? Let us, in the forming Resolutions, have a special Regard to the subduing that Vice. Are we by our Tempers inclined to Ease, or Pleasure, or too free a Gratification of our sensual Appetites? And this Humour of ours we find doth betray us into the great Inconveniencies of our Lives? Why, above all Things, we should take Care to keep a strict Guard over ourselves as to that Point, and endeavour to work our Minds to the strongest Resolutions of a severe Sobriety and Temperance. And so in all other Things.

But this is not all I intend under this Consideration. Tho' it is fit, that in making up our Resolution, we should have a principal Regard to the leading predominant Sins of our Life; and those Infirmities of our Temper that do us most Mischief, yet we must not neglect to provide against our other Sins and Weaknesses. And therefore it will not be amiss, when we are about this great Work, that we make it our Business to search, as particularly as we can, into all the several Heads and Branches of our Duty, both towards God, and towards our Neighbour, and towards ourselves. And when we have done this, to call ourselves to account how we have performed it; what Part of it we have

most notoriously omitted, and what Part of it we have transgressed by notorious actual Sins; and then, accordingly as our Conscience gives in Evidence to us concerning these Matters, we are to take up particular Resolutions to be careful for the future, both to do those Things which we find we have hitherto been negligent in, and to avoid those Things wherein we have hitherto transgressed. By observing this Course, we shall have done ourselves very great Service, whenever we come to bring our Resolutions into Action. For this is the best Method both to secure our Performance of them, and also to perform them with the least Labour and Trouble. For by this Means, as we are especially fortified against those Enemies of ours that are most treacherous, and have most Power to do us Mischief (*viz.* the Sins of our Tempers and Constitutions;) so also are we provided against every other Lust that make an Assault upon us, nor will it be in the Power of any of them easily to surprize us.

4. Another Thing we are to observe in the forming our Resolutions, is this; that we should not only resolve upon such and such particular Things to be done or to be avoided by us, but we should also consider how those Things are to be done or to be avoided. What are the properest Methods and Expedients for the effecting of our Purposes, and to resolve upon them also.

He who resolves upon the End, and pitcheth not upon the Means for the attaining that End, doth but half his Work. You find, it may be, that the great Sin of your Life is Intemperance, or that which we call too much Good-Fellowship; and you make most strict and particular Resolutions to avoid that Sin for the future: If now you would take the right Course to have those Resolutions effectual, it will be fit you should enquire what are the great Occasions and Temptations that draw you into this Sin. After you have found them, examine further whether those Occasions and Temptations are of your own making, and such as you may easily prevent or avoid, if you please, or whether they are unavoidably incident to your Business or Calling, or the like. If they be of the former Sort, you must resolve quite to cut them off, or to keep out of the Way of them. It is an idle Thing to think of practising Sobriety and Temperance so long as we encourage the Occasions, and throw ourselves into the Temptations that cause our Intemperance. But if we find that these Temptations are really such as we cannot avoid, but they lie in the Course of our necessary Business and Employments, then we are to secure ourselves against this Vice another Way; not by flying the Temptations, but by standing upon our Guard, which is done either by wholly denying

denying our Appetites in what they desire, or by confining them to such precise Measures of Meat and Drink, which they shall not exceed.——And thus again. Is Anger, and Wrathfulness, and Impatience the great Sin we mean to set ourselves against? Why, it is not enough to resolve, *I will not be angry, nothing shall put me into a Passion;* but we must likewise resolve thus, *Such and such Things are very apt to provoke me, and put me out of Temper, and therefore I will keep out of the Way of them.* Or, *I find that it is the too sudden and free venting of my Mind when I am provoked, that blows me into those unseemly Fits of Rage and Fury; and therefore, I am resolved, when the next Provocation is offered me, I will seal up my Lips for some Time, and either speak nothing at all, or speak mild and gentle Words.*

Thus should we do as to every Instance of our Duty we resolve upon, or every Sin we resolve against: Inquire into the best Means and Expedients for the securing of the one, and mortifying the other, and put them into our Resolutions also.

5. But, in the last Place, in the forming our Resolutions we must be mighty careful not to clog them with too many needless, uncommanded Things. What is absolutely necessary for the securing our Virtue and Obedience to God's Laws, it is fit should be very firmly and particularly resolved by us. But for other Things, tho' they

may be sometimes very convenient, and may prove, if discreetly used, excellent Instruments for the promoting Virtue and Goodness; yet, if they be no direct Parts of our Duty imposed upon us by God, or necessarily required as Means for the performing that Duty, it will be very dangerous to tie them upon ourselves, especially for any long Time. Let no Man therefore, especially no young Beginner in Religion, easily put more Impositions upon himself, than God has put upon him. Let him not abridge himself of that Liberty which Christ hath left him. If he bind himself to all that is barely needful to preserve his Innocence, and secure the Performance of his Duty, it is enough for one in his Circumstances. But if he will make Resolutions, *that he will, for Instance, spend so great a Portion of his Time in Prayers, that he will read so much of a good Book every Day, that he will fast so often, that he will wholly abstain from such and such particular Things that are not in themselves evil;* I say, in my Opinion, he doth not act prudently in so doing; for these kind of Things do generally prove a Snare to those who use them. They make the Work of Religion intolerably heavy and troublesome; and a Man, in a little Time, grows so weary of them, that he repents he ever bound up himself to them: and it is ten to one but in some Humour or other he will launch

launch out and break all his Fences of this kind. And when he hath done so, it is odds but he goes farther, and lets fall those very Resolutions he made of necessary indispensable Virtue and Holiness. Certainly the being false to his Vows of one kind, will mightily dispose him to be so to those of the other, since he hath obliged himself equally to both. And sad Experience shews, that this indeed too often comes to pass. If therefore a Man thinks of tying up himself as to these indifferent Matters, as believing that the so doing will be a good Guard to his Virtue, let him take good Advice before he doth it; and especially let him oblige himself but for a little Time, since, if he finds his Resolutions expedient, he may repeat them when he pleases. But if he make Resolutions for a long Time, he cannot, if he finds them inconvenient, so easily undo them again.

What I have hitherto said, has been wholly concerning the forming of our Resolutions of Virtue and an holy Life. But there are some Things that concern the Government of ourselves after we have actually taken up those Resolutions, that are every whit as necessary to the good Success of them, as the former Points.

II. To give you some Account of these, is the second Point I undertook in this Discourse; of which I shall speak very briefly.

1. In the first Place therefore, let us not think it sufficient to have made wise, and strong, and good Resolutions once for all, unless we frequently renew them. The firmest and the best contrived Purposes will, in Time and by Degrees, grow very feeble, and languid, and lose all the Force they should have upon us, if we do not take Care to put new Life into them, by over and over again impressing them upon our own Minds, and repeating all the Arguments and Considerations that at first prevailed with us to take them up. It will therefore highly concern us, after we are once entred into hearty and settled Resolutions to serve God, never to let them cool, but to keep up the Fire that is kindled in our Hearts, by constantly ministring Fuel to it. To this End, let us every Day we rise, enter into a serious Consideration of the Obligations we have laid upon ourselves. Let us ask our Hearts how they now stand inclined towards them. They were very forward at first to undertake the Service of God; Do they still continue so? Are they as full of Hatred and Detestation of Sin, and as vigorously bent to pursue the Paths of Virtue and Religion, as they were when they lately enter'd into Covenant with God? If we find that they flag and waver, and cannot answer us with that Briskness that before they did; *We will be good, we will live virtuously, we will serve God.*

God.—Let us ply them with Arguments; let us lay before them the mighty Obligations they had at first to undertake this great Work, and convince them, that they have the same Obligations to persevere in it. Let us beg of them to consider how infinitely good God is in himself, and how infinitely kind and bountiful he hath been to us every Moment of our Lives; and consequently how just and reasonable it is, that we should for ever give up ourselves to the Service of him. Let us represent to them, how righteous, how good, how equitable all his Laws are; how much the Observance of them tends to our Advantage; insomuch that it is infinitely more our Interest than God's, that we should yield a due Obedience to them. Let us persuade them of the great Folly and Vanity, and the intolerable Mischiefs and Inconveniencies that do attend those Courses we have formerly pursued, and which it seems they have now a Desire to return to again. Let us lay before them how much Pain, and Grief, and Anguish, and Sorrow it cost our Blessed Saviour to redeem us from our vain Conversation; and to purchase for us the Pardon of those cursed Sins of ours, which we are now meditating to take again into our Bosom. If all this will not work upon our Hearts, let them be further remembred that they are now actually engaged in God's Service, and
have,

have, by the most solemn Vows in the World, obliged themselves to continue in it, and therefore it is now too late to look back. To be guilty of so base a Perfidiousness, as it will be a most horrid Crime, so will the Vengeance of God not fail to pursue us for it. Besides, now we are in a fair Way to attain Heaven and eternal Happiness, a good Beginning being in a manner half the Work: But if we fall back, we have lost all the Pains we have already taken in raising up ourselves to this Pitch, and are but just where we were before we begun this Business. And who knows whether we shall ever be able to begin it again? Who knows whether ever God will again afford us either the Grace or the Means to do it? If, notwithstanding all this, your Hearts are yet heavy, and untoward, and unwilling to go on in this Work, you must tell them plainly, that *they must go on, there is an absolute Necessity for it.* This is a Business that concerns you as much as your Souls are worth. Your everlasting Salvation or Damnation depends upon it, and therefore there is no dallying in the Matter. In a Word, we must never leave ourselves till we have so fired our Hearts, that they resolve with all Alacrity to go on as they have begun: that they tell us peremptorily, *I will go to my Father. I will be good whatever it costs me. I will stand to my Vows what Opposition soever I meet*

meet with. *I will never forsake the Service of my God; and particularly this following Day I will so take heed to all my Ways, that I will not offend against any of my Purposes.*

Oh! my Brethren, if we would but thus frequently commune with our own Hearts, and daily thus reinforce our good Resolutions, how easy would it be for us to be good! How easy to vanquish all our evil Habits, and to triumph over every Thing that opposeth us! Nay, I may say, how hard a Matter would it be for us to be bad! We should subvert all Difficulties, and every Day grow better and better, till at last we had got as obstinate confirmed Habits of Virtue and Goodness, as other Men now have, or we ourselves before had, of Vice and Sin.

2. Especially if we join another Thing, which I come now to mention, *viz.* If we mean our Resolutions should bring forth those good Fruits we make them for, we must remember that there is another necessary Duty to be performed by us, and that is, daily and constant Prayer to God Almighty, for his Grace and Holy Spirit to go along with us in the great Work we have undertaken. Alas! we are of ourselves poor frail Creatures. The firmest Resolutions we have made, the strongest Guard we have placed about ourselves, will not protect us from the Deceitfulness of
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our own Hearts, and the Subtilty of our Enemies, and the Strength of the Temptations with which we are continually assaulted, without the Assistance and Influence of the Holy Spirit of Christ. Now the only Method we can take for the alluring that Divine Spirit down into our Hearts, is, as our Lord Jesus hath told us, humble, and serious, and fervent Prayer. God will no more deny that good Spirit to all who thus ask it, than a Father will deny Bread to his hungry Children, when they cry for it. If ever therefore we mean to proceed happily in what we have undertaken, and to bring our Resolutions to Effect, let this sink down into our Hearts. We must be no Strangers at the Throne of Grace. We must apply there every Day as constantly as we do every Day eat, drink, and sleep. We must no more live a Day without praying, than we do without taking our Food and Nourishment. And when we are before God in this holy Exercise, whether it be in the Church, or in our Closets, or in any other Place, O let us then and there pour out our Souls to him with all Humility, acknowledging our own Vileness, and representing to him our various Wants and Necessities, and begging a Supply of them from his infinite Bounty, with as much Earnestness and Concernedness, as an hungry Beggar begs Alms at our Doors. Let us tell him
how

how extremely sensible we are of our great Infirmities and Easiness of Nature. We dare not trust our own Hearts; we find we have no Strength of ourselves to do any good Action, much less to accomplish so great a Work as we have undertaken; and therefore that we cast ourselves entirely upon him. It is his Work that we are engaged in; and therefore we cannot doubt he will carry us through it. We have no Expectancy from ourselves, or any other Creature, but depend upon him alone, and his Aids from above. It is he, who of his great Mercy hath put these good Purposes and Resolutions into our Hearts; and blessed be his Name that he hath done so. And now we desire nothing so much in the World, as that we may for ever continue in them. For Christ Jesus sake therefore we beseech him, that he would not forsake us, that he would not withdraw his Grace from us, and leave us to ourselves; but that he would continue and improve it, that he would *carry on and perfect that good Work he hath been pleased already to begin in us.*

Oh! my Brethren, such Breathings of our Souls after God as these, are never sent up in vain. They pierce the Heavens, and are returned with such gentle Showers of Grace and Influence from above, as will not fail both to refresh our languishing Souls, and to enable us to bear such good Fruits

Fruits (if we be not wanting in our Endeavours) as shall answer all our own Designs, and be acceptable to the great Husbandman, *who hath sown the good Seed in our Hearts.*

3. But lastly, I have but one Thing more to add to what I have said about this Business of Resolutions, and I have done.--- You have, it may be, oftentimes before this, made many solemn Resolutions and Vows to forsake your Sins, particularly such as you have found to be the growing prevailing Hindrances of Goodness in you, and to enter into a stricter Way of Living: But you have found that these Resolutions have hitherto been ineffectual, and that notwithstanding them, you are still but the same Persons that you were before.

That which I have to say in this Matter is this: That this ought not to discourage you from trying again. If your good Resolutions have not been hitherto successful, it is fit, nay it is necessary, that you should resolve so long, till they be so. Once more therefore, in God's Name, enter upon the Work; only use more Care, and Diligence, and Consideration in the framing your Resolutions, and set your selves more seriously to the performing of them, and, my Life for yours, they will, with the Grace of God, prosper in your Hands.

But this is not all I meant to say under this Head. As none, who have formerly resolved

resolved to serve God, and have failed in their Undertakings, ought to be discourag'd from making new Resolutions to serve him: So none, who are now entering into Engagements of that kind, should be discouraged from going on with the Work they have engaged in, tho' they now and then, thro' the Violence of Temptation, or the Strength of their Corruptions, do act against what they have resolved. The not attending to this, is oftentimes the Cause that most excellent Beginnings in Virtue come to nothing. After we have once or twice broken our Purposes, we are apt either to think that all our Obligations to them are cancelled, or we think it in vain to pursue them any further; and so we break loose into all the Extravagancies that our ungoverned Appetites and Inclinations can prompt us to. But this is the worst Reasoning in the World. If we would act like Men of Sense, when our Resolutions are too weak to bridle our Appetites, and keep us within Bounds, we should rather endeavour to strengthen them, than to cast them quite off. If ever therefore you mean to be so virtuous, so good as you resolve to be, so to serve God as you purpose now to do, it will concern you particularly not to be too much discouraged or cast down, if you should now and then fly out into Actions, that you have resolved against; but rather to take that

that Occasion of renewing your Vows and Resolutions, and walking more carefully for the future. By this Means you will not only not suffer by your Sins and Frailties, but turn them to your great Advantage.

I beseech you remember this, and I conclude with it; That the greatest Hurt or Mischief that any particular Act of Sin can do us, lies not in the Guilt that is contracted by it, but in the Tendency it has to unhinge our Vows and Purposes, and to make us fall back into a Life of Carelessness, and Sensuality, and Irreligion. If we can but rescue ourselves from these ill Consequences of it, and proceed notwithstanding in our Course of an holy and virtuous Life, the Sin will never be remembered against us in the Day of Judgment; but we shall for all that, if we persevere in our Endeavours, find an Admittance into the everlasting Kingdom.



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SERMON XII.

What is meant by setting our Affections on Heavenly Things, and not on Earthly: And how absolutely necessary it is, that we should thus rightly place our Affections.

COLOS. iii. 2.

Set your Affections on Things above, and not on Things on the Earth.



THESE Words, tho' as they lie in the Chapter they bear the Form of a Precept or Exhortation, yet we may consider them as an Answer to the great Enquiry of Mankind: A divine Resolution of that important Case, which every Man puts to himself. The great End that all Mankind pursue, is to be as happy as they can. This we are all agreed upon. But as to the Way of attaining this Happiness,

or the Things in which it doth consist, about these we differ. For Men finding in themselves Appetites and Desires of several Sorts to be gratified, and Necessities of sundry Kinds to be supplied, and accordingly there being so many kinds of Objects that tend to the Gratification of those Appetites, and to the supplying those Necessities, which present themselves under the Notion of *Goods* (as indeed they are) it can scarce be avoided but that Men will differ, if not in their Opinions, yet in their Choice and Determination, which of these various Appetites they will lay out themselves in the satisfying of; which of those Goods they will make it their Business to furnish themselves with. And hence it comes to pass, that so many different Designs are driven on in the World: And all of them too in order to the same End; that is, the living a happy Life. 'Tho' it is sadly true, that far the greatest Number of Men do exceedingly fail of their End.

The great Concernment then of every Man, when he comes to the Use of his Reason, is to chuse right for himself; to propose such Designs to pitch upon, such Objects to lay out himself upon, as will not fail to secure to him the great End, *viz.* the being as happy as he can be.

Now

Now all the Objects in the World, that can be supposed to recommend themselves to our Desires or Pursuit, as the Things that will make us happy (how many and various soever the Particulars be, yet) we shall find, that they may conveniently enough be reduced to two Heads; *The Things of the Earth*, and, *The Things above*, as the Apostle in my Text distributes them. So that between these two Sorts of Things will lie the Competition.

By the Things of the Earth we may understand all Sorts of Goods that are here about us, that affect our Senses, that gratify our animal Appetites, that do directly and immediately tend to the Preservation or Well-being of our bodily Life, such as Riches, Pleasures, Honours, Knowledge of Arts and Sciences, and the like. ———

By the Things above, we understand not only the glorious Rewards, which we expect after Death in the Kingdom of Heaven, but also all those Qualities and Dispositions of Mind, which do prepare us for, and make us capable of those Rewards, such as Virtue, and Goodness, and the Fear of God. ——— In a Word, by the former we understand all those Things that do concern our Bodies, or our outward Man; by the latter, all those Things that do concern our Souls, or our inward Man.

Now we do not so oppose these two Kinds of Things, as to make our Pursuit or Acquisition of the one of them incompatible with our Pursuit or Acquisition of the other. The Question is not whether, in order to our Happiness, we are so wholly to attend one, as altogether to neglect the other. No; *the Things on Earth*, and *the Things above*, have both the Notion of Good, and therefore are both desirable, and therefore may be both laboured after, and may, at least in some Degree, be attained; and when they are attained, may be enjoyed; and when they are enjoyed, we may take Delight and Complacency in that Enjoyment. But the Point lies here; which of these, in order to our Happiness, we are to set our Affections upon: That is to say, since every Man, who doth not live by Chance, and is not like a Brute, perfectly acted by Things without him, doth propose to himself some Design to pursue, as the great Business of his Life, and upon the effecting of which, he takes his Happiness mainly to depend, and what he thus makes his chiefest Business, is preferred by him before all other Ends, takes up the greatest Share of his Thoughts, and Labours, and Endeavours, while his other Projects give way to this, and are managed in Subordination to it. (No Man being able to drive on several different Designs with

with the highest Degree of Earnestness and Fervor of Mind at the same Time) And since, lastly, no Man can make any thing his main Design but it will fall under one of these two Heads, either the *Things of the Earth*, or the *Things above*, the great Question is, which of these two Kinds of Things are to have the Pre-eminence in our Choice? Which of them, if we will act like reasonable Men, and consult our own Happiness and Advantage as much as we can, we are to pitch upon, as the main standing Business of our Lives, the Thing we live for, the Thing we will labour after in the first Place?

This is the great Inquiry. And this the Apostle resolves in my Text, when he adviseth us to *set our Affections on the Things above, and not on the Things on the Earth*. The Reasonableness of which Advice of his, it is the Business of the following Discourse to make out.

In order whereunto I shall shew, that all those Motives and Arguments, which do usually prevail with Mankind for the determining their Choice to this particular Thing rather than another, are much stronger on the Part of *the Things above*, than on the Part of *the Things of the Earth*. Which, if it be made to appear, the Consequence will be, that *that Man* is a Fool, and acts against his own Interest, against the common Reason of Mankind, nay,

againſt thoſe Rules that he himſelf in all other Caſes proceeds by, who *ſets his Affections on the Things of the Earth*, and doth not make it the main Buſineſs of his Life to ſerve God, to get virtuous Habits, and by that means to ſecure his ſpiritual and eternal Interests. Now for the making this good, there needs no more than to lay theſe following Things before you.

I. Firſt of all: When two Things are propoſed to our Choice, we uſe to conſider which of them we have moſt in our Power, which of them we are in the likeliest Way to attain to if we ſet about it. Now ſuppoſing thoſe Things to be equally good, and equally deſirable, yet, if we can certainly ſay of one of them, this Good I am ſure to make mine own, if I will uſe my Endeavour for the obtaining it, but cannot ſay the ſame of the other Thing, this alone is enough to determine a conſidering Man to which of thoſe two Goods he is to give the Preference in his Choice. There is no Doubt, but, all other Things equal, every wiſe Man will reject that which he is uncertain whether he ſhall obtain or no, and apply himſelf to that which he is certain he may obtain if he pleaſes.

Let this now be applied to our preſent Caſe. Here are, on one hand, the Things of the World, *viz.* Wealth, Honours, Pleaſures, and abundance of other ſuch Things,

as tend to make our outward Condition easy, and happy, and prosperous; and these do tempt us to lay out ourselves upon them. Here are, on the other hand, Virtue and Piety, and the eternal Happiness that is consequent upon them; and these do likewise invite us to make them our principal Aim. We will suppose at this Time both these Things to be equally good, and equally to recommend themselves to our Choice (and thus much at least we may be allowed to suppose.) The Question therefore is, to which of these Two we will chiefly direct our Study and Pursuit? I say, if we will be governed by the foregoing Rule, we shall of Necessity resolve upon these latter, because they are certainly in our Power; but the former are not. No Man can say before-hand, *I am sure I shall compass such an Estate that I aim at, or attain to such Preferments which are in my Eye, or be successful in this or the other Design of Pleasure that I propose to myself.* But every Man in the World may say, *I am certain I may be good, if I have a Mind. I am certain that I may live righteously, and soberly, and religiously, if I please. And if I do so, I am equally certain that God will take me to his Mercy and Favour both here and hereafter.* And the Reason is clear; the former Things depend upon a hundred accidental Circumstances, none of which are at our Command. Abundance of

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Things, which we never dream'd of, come between us and our Designs of that Nature; nay, tho' those Designs were as well laid, and as carefully managed, as the Wit of Man can devise; and this the Experience of the World doth every Day make good. But now the other sort of Things; to be temperate, and charitable, and chaste, and devout, to furnish our Souls with all the virtuous Habits that will recommend us to God's Favour, these are not subject to such Contingencies; they depend only upon ourselves and the Grace of God. No outward Agent, no cross Posture of Circumstances, can defeat our Labours and Endeavours after them. We may undoubtedly, if we please, intend them sincerely, and pursue them industriously; and if we do so, we may undoubtedly expect the Grace of God to further and assist us; (for he hath solemnly promised it) and if so, what Thing is there in the World that can render our Designs ineffectual?

II. But supposing the *Things above and the Things on Earth* were equally in our Power, (which you see they are not :) Supposing that every Man may be as certain of succeeding in all his worldly Designs, as in those relating to his Soul; yet which of these will require the greater Pains? Which of these Ends can be serv'd with most Ease, and with the least Difficulty?

culty? This is another Thing, which, when two Designs, different from each other, are proposed to us, we usually enquire after, before we fix upon either. And surely, if the Difference between them lies in nothing else but this, all the World will agree, that *that Good*, which is most easily come by, is to be preferr'd before *that* which cannot be had without more Pains and Difficulty. Now let us examine, whether upon this Account, as well as the former, the Goods of our Souls do not much more recommend themselves to our Choice and Pursuit, than those of the Body. And for the adjusting of this, we need only ask these Questions. Which of the Two will require more Skill and Application of Mind? Which of the Two will engage us in more Labour and Toil of Body? And which of the Two will take up more of our Time for the compassing of them?

1. Now as to the Degree of Skill required to the successful Prosecution of the one or the other, there is no Comparison between them. Virtue and Goodness, every body knows, are simple Things, and the Way to them lies plain and even before us. There needs no great Depth of Parts, no Shrewdness and Subtlety of Understanding, no curious Plots and Contrivances for the attaining of them. Every one hath Skill enough to be virtuous, if he bring but a good Will to it: nor is any Man ever
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at a Loss what Course to take, what Methods to follow, for the bringing about his Purpose. In this Case, Honesty and Sincerity of Heart is all that is required. But it is quite otherwise with our Worldly Designs; for the compassing them there is need of a great deal of Art. Every Man is not presently fit to go about them. Abundance of Cunning is required to the dextrous Management of them. A Man must bend his Brains to them, as well as his Inclinations. He must study, and think, and contrive, and toss Things in his Head a hundred Ways, and all this little enough for the putting his Business into any Forwardness. Nay, and oftentimes when he hath done all this, he will still stick in the Briers, and be at a Loss which Way to go on. Nor is it thus only with the greater and more difficult Designs of human Life, such as the Attainment of Power, and Dignity, and Riches, but almost every petty Project that a Man busies himself about. As the Things of the World go, the managing of a very trivial Business, or the prosecuting some very inconsiderable Design, doth sufficiently exercise a Man's Wit and Invention, and he finds Difficulty enough in going thro' it. So that in this respect *the Things above* have certainly the Advantage of *the Things on the Earth*, viz. in Point of Easiness of Acquisition.

2. But this is not all. Let us see next, whether of the Two will engage a Man in more Action, and Labour, and Toil for the obtaining of them. But neither will this bear any Dispute. For there are none, who understand any thing of the World, but must be sensible what a deal of Pains a Man must take, who means to thrive in his Calling; or who proposeth to be rich, or who intends to get together a great Stock of Learning or Knowledge, or who resolves indeed successfully to prosecute any Design of Pleasure, or Ambition, or the like. How much Rest must he lose! What a Bustle and Hurry is he almost continually in! What Drudgery and Labour is he exposed to! What uneasy, unagreeable Tasks is he frequently forced to undergo! And he feels the Effects of all this in the Weariness and Consumption of Spirits, which his over-harrassing himself doth frequently bring upon him. — But now there is none of this Fatigue, none of this Tugging and Turmoil in pursuing the Designs of Virtue. There the more still, and quiet, and composed a Man is, the better is his Work likely to go on. No Action of Religion doth engage a Man in any hard Toil or Labour, or disturb his Rest, or put him to the Inconveniencies of Weariness or ill Hours. The Truth is, virtuous Habits are not so much attained by Action and Labour, as by suspending our Action, and
ceasing

ceasing from Labour! and it is Vice only, or our worldly Concerns, that put us upon taking Pains. As for Instance; Would I be temperate? I have nothing to do but to cease eating and drinking when Nature is satisfied; but to be intemperate, engages me to take Pains in the oppressing my Stomach with Loads of Meat and Drink. Would a Man be chaste and pure? He hath nothing to do but to sit still, and to keep his Thoughts at home. But to manage an Intrigue of Lust, destroys his Ease and Peace, and puts him upon many Toils and Difficulties. Would a Man exercise Meekness and Patience? It is done by saying or doing nothing when he is provoked. But to be angry and revengeful, sets all the Powers of his Soul and Body in a Hurry and Agitation, and a Man takes a great deal of Pains to trouble and torment himself. This great Advantage there is in the Pursuit of the Ways of Virtue, and the Happiness of the other World, which neither any vicious, no, nor any worldly Designs can pretend to have.

3. But if it be still a Question whether *the Things of the Earth*, or *the Things above*, are to be come by most easily, and with the least Difficulty, let it be further considered, whether of them do take up more of our Time for the compassing of them. If it appears that Things temporal necessarily do so, then it will be no longer
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a Question; for it is plain, in Point of Easiness, that the Advantage will lie on the Part of Things spiritual. Now that they do so cannot be doubted by any one, who considers that the Pursuit of our worldly Designs (if we mean to be successful in them to that Degree we usually propose to ourselves) doth, and always will employ much the greatest Part of our Lives. Who can hope to be rich, or great, or learned, or serve any other considerable secular End, but he must, in a manner, be obliged wholly to attend upon that very Thing? Nay, a great many are forced to be such Slaves to their Business, and to their Designs, that they can scarce allow themselves Leisure to take the ordinary Refreshments of Nature, *rising up early, and taking Rest late, and continually eating the Bread of Carefulness*, as the Psalmist expresses it. And this too, many a time, for the getting them a very ordinary Livelihood: Whereas the Business of Religion doth not thus enslave us. Nay, so far from that, a moderate Portion of our daily Time, duly set apart, and carefully employed, will not fail, with the Grace of God, to secure to us all the Interests of our Souls, both in this World and that which is to come. Even those Hours, which a great many Men may well spare from their Business, and that Time which lies upon the Hands of others, and which they spend
either

either impertinently or viciously: I say, was this well husbanded to the Purposes of Virtue, it would make a Man everlastingly happy. So little doth Religion en-
thrall Mankind, or the Offices of it devour their Time.

All these Things now considered, we cannot but be fully convinced, that as *the Things above*, the Concernments of our Souls, Virtue and Goodness, and eternal Salvation, are much more certain to be attained, if we labour after them, than the *Things of this World*; so are they also to be attained with a great deal less Trouble and Difficulty. And therefore, supposing them to be but equally good, and equally desirable with the other, we must act against the common Notion and Practice of Mankind, if we do not rather *set our Affection* and fix our Designs upon them, than upon *the Things on the Earth*. And this is the second Thing I had to offer upon this Argument.

III. But, thirdly, we have hitherto put *the Things above and the Things on the Earth* upon the same Level, as to their intrinsic Value. We have hitherto supposed them to be both equally good, and equally desirable. But I desire it may be considered, that this is by no means a fair Supposition. There is a vast Difference between the Goodness of the one and of the other. The
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one are always good; the other only contingently so. The one always promote our Happiness; the other often prove evil and mischievous to us. There is no Man can say before-hand, of any temporal Design that he drives on, that he shall certainly be the better, if he succeeds in it: For it may, and often doth happen, that he is the worse. But, on the contrary, we may always say truly of spiritual Things, the more of them that we purchase to our selves, the better and the happier we are.

Piety, Virtue and Goodness, are Things desirable for themselves. They can never come amiss to any Man. He who hath them, shall never be a Loser by them, will never repent that he laid out his Pains and Study in the Acquisition of them. They recommend themselves to the Reason and Understanding of Mankind; and no Peculiarity of Temper, no Posture of Affairs, no outward Condition, can render them useless to us. Nay, whatever our external Circumstances be, we shall always receive great Benefit and Advantage from them. The more piously we live, the more we love God, and do Good in the World; the more temperate, and humble, and charitable we are, still the more happy and the better pleased we find ourselves to be, whatever Change there happens in our outward Condition and Circumstances of Life.

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But it is often quite otherwise with the other Sort of Things. They are not good, but in certain Cases. They are not valuable for themselves, but for other Ends and Purposes, which they serve to. And there must be the Concurrence of abundance of contingent Circumstances to make them fit, or convenient, or useful to us. Take those of them that make the greatest Noise and Shew in the World; those of them that are generally accounted the most desirable, most courted by Mankind, (such as Greatness, Honour and Power, and the Affluence of all Things, that make either for Pomp of Pleasure) Doth not the Experience of the World make good, that after a Man hath spent a great deal of Time and Pains in the Pursuit of them, and, with much ado, has obtained what his Heart desired, yet they generally come very much short of his Expectation? Nay, where he once finds in them the Good that he promised himself, he ten times fails of it: Nay, he not only finds his Expectations defeated, but, to his Cost, he sees, that the Things which looked very lovely and charming before he had them, after he is in Possession of them, appear quite with another Face. He finds they are so far from contributing to the bettering of his Condition, that they render it worse. That Good which all the World admired and
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cried up, and he, upon the Noise, was so alarmed, that he was resolved to have it, whatever it cost him. Now that he has it, he feels that he is more uneasy than he was before. It either suits not with his Temper, or it involves him in a Multitude of Cares and Anxieties, of Troubles and Vexations, which before he was unacquainted with, and which render his Life miserable. Or, lastly, it engages him in such Follies, and Vices, and Debaucheries, as perhaps, had he been in another Condition, he had never been guilty of, and which at last end in his Ruin and Destruction. Thus it is often with the secular Designs we pursue. Tho' the Things we labour after appear very convenient and desirable at a Distance, yet, alas! we know not but that the next Moment after we possess them, we shall be heartily weary of them, and repent that we spent so much Pains about them. Only virtuous Habits, and a pure Conscience, no Man ever found a Burden to him. No Man ever grudged the Pains he took about them. No Man ever found them unfit for his Circumstances, or wished to be rid of them.

IV. But, fourthly, when we compare two Goods, in order to our chusing which of them we should apply ourselves to, we do not only examine which of them is really best for us, but also which of them is the

most durable Good ; which of them is most in our Power to keep after we are possessed of it. No Man will lay out as much Cost on an Estate whose Title may be called in question, and of which he may be dispossessed in a little Time, as he would upon that which he is morally sure is indisputably good to him and his Heirs ; nay, tho' the Estate whose Title is litigable was much better in present than the other. In this Case Nature would have its Course. The Man who is concerned would undoubtedly say, Give me a Certainty, tho' it be little, rather than an uncertain Estate, tho' of much greater Value. Now why should we not reason thus in the great Debate between the Concernments of our Souls and Bodies, as we do in every petty Purchase we make ? If we would, I dare say, it would be no Conjecture on which Side the Victory would remain. Let us suppose again (which yet you see is not true) that those worldly Designs we propose to our selves, will, if we can accomplish them, really prove advantageous to us, and answer all our Expectations : And we can say no more of the Things of the Spirit. Let them therefore once again, as to this Point, be equal, yet whether of them can we best secure to ourselves for Futurity ? Alas ! there is no Man, that knows the World, but must needs acknowledge, that all Things in it are variable and uncertain :

are ours To-Day, and gone To-morrow. There is no temporal Good whatsoever, that a Man can truly call his own, there being an hundred Contingencies that may the next Moment deprive him of it. But it is not thus with spiritual Things. They are out of the Reach of Fortune. They are not obnoxious, either to Decays, or Casualties, or to the Violence of others. It is not in the Power of the whole World to take them from us, after we are once possessed of them. A Thief may rob me of my Money, but he cannot steal my Virtue from me. I may, by a Turn of State, lose my Greatness, or my Preferments, and become low and despised; but the worst of my Enemies cannot destroy the Peace and Content of my Mind, which arises from the Reflection upon my good Actions, and the Hopes of a happy Life after this. Sickness or Age may make me lose the Comeliness of my Person, but they can never alter the Complexion of my Mind. A War or a Pestilence may divorce me from my Wife and Children, from my dearest Friends or Relations, but they can never separate me from my Patience and Courage, from the Love of my God and my Acquiescence in his Providence, and the Hopes of his Favour in another World. Since therefore the Matter clearly stands thus, as to Things spiritual and Things temporal, let all the World judge whether

of these a Man in reason ought to *set his Affections on*. Whether it be not extremely
 John 6. 27. absurd to labour more for *the Meat that*
perisheth, than for that *which endureth to*
 Matt. 6. 19, 20. *Life everlasting*; To lay up to ourselves Treas-
ure upon Earth, where Moth and Rust doth
corrupt, and where Thieves break thro' and
steal, without being sollicitous of laying up
to ourselves Treasures in Heaven, which are
 not subject to any of these Inconvenien-
 cies.

V. But, fifthly, let it be considered, that
the Things above, that is to say, those Ac-
 complishments which recommend us to
 God, and make us capable of the Rewards
 of the other World, as they are more du-
 rable, more pertinent than *the Things on*
the Earth; so also are they, in their own
 Nature, more noble and excellent. (For
 all outward Good doth but gratify some of
 our bodily Senses.) How much soever
 they may be esteemed by Mankind, yet
 they serve no higher End, than the yield-
 ing Satisfaction to those Appetites which
 are common with us to brute Creatures.
 There is not a Beast of the Field but hath
 the same Enjoyments, and the same Plea-
 sures that any worldly Man receives from
 those sensible Things which he busies him-
 self about. For the Sum of all his Labours
 and Endeavours comes but to this, that he be
 put into good outward Circumstances; that
 he

he be in such a Condition, that all his Senses may be gratified; that he may eat and drink well; that he may have Variety of sensual Pleasures; and that he may be free from the Fears of Want, both as to himself and his Children. And do not the Brutes enjoy themselves as much as such a Man in all these Respects? Have not they all these Satisfactions? There is no Doubt of it. If there be any Question about this, it is, whether they have not these Enjoyments in greater Perfection, than worldly, vicious Men have. For the Beasts are free from all those Anxieties, and Fears, and uncomfortable Reflexions, which oftentimes grate upon the Minds of such Men, even in the midst of their best and highest animal Gratifications. But now these Goods that are of a spiritual Nature, do gratify the intellectual Appetites of Mankind. They are the proper Objects of those Powers and Faculties whereby Mankind are distinguished from Brutes. They are such kind of Goods, as Men (as they are Men) can only be pleased with.

What is it that we have above Brutes, but these two Things, the Power of Reason, and the Sense of Religion? Now how are these two Faculties perfected? What are the adequate Objects of them? Doth not the Perfection of our Reason consist in employing our Understandings about the best Objects, and using our Liberty in

the best Way? Do we not then act most reasonably, when we propose to ourselves the worthiest Ends, and steadily pursue those Means which lead to those Ends, and when we keep all our inferior Appetites, common to us with the Brutes, under due Regulation and Government? But what is all this but another Name for Virtue? And further, What is it that that Sense of Religion, which Nature hath endowed us with above brute Creatures, doth put us upon? In what Way is that to be exercised? Doth it not consist in performing Acts of Worship, and Praise, and Adoration to the Supreme Being, in acknowledging, in loving, in depending upon him, who gives us whatever we enjoy, and having a constant Sense of his Presence, and Power, and Goodness? So that to employ ourselves in these kinds of Things, to study them, to be daily conversant in them, to make them the Business of our Lives, is the only Evidence we can give that we live like Men; That we look upon ourselves as placed in a higher Rank of Beings, than the Beasts: That we put our rational Natures to that Use, that by their very Make and Constitution they were designed to be put to. And however it be, that the Pleasure and Satisfaction which arise from these Things, *viz.* Virtue and Religion, do not make so great a Noise, nay, perhaps, may seem very flat and insipid to those who are

unacquainted with them; yet, I am certain, there is none, who hath ever made Tryal of them, but is abundantly convinced that they far transcend all the Gratifications of Sense in the World. That to serve God, and to keep a good Conscience, and to govern our Passions, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly, yields infinitely more Peace, and Pleasure, and Satisfaction to a Man's Mind, than the happiest outward Condition, the most prosperous Successes of our worldly Designs. And indeed, in the Reason of the Thing, it must be thus: Forasmuch as the higher and nobler the Faculties are, so much the more exquisitely delightful must be their Satisfaction. So many Degrees therefore as Reason and Understanding are above Sense, so many Degrees proportionably must Virtue and Goodness, which are their proper Objects, exceed all sensible Enjoyments.

And thus much of the fifth Consideration. The Sum of what I have hitherto said, comes to this, that if either you will chuse a Certainty, before an Uncertainty; or that which is easy to be come by, before that which is difficult; or that which is really and indisputably good, good at all Times, and in all Circumstances, before that which it is doubtful whether it be good or no; or that Good which you can call your own, before that which is at the Mercy of a thousand Accidents every Day; or,

lastly, that Good, which is the highest and noblest which our Natures are capable of, before that which is mean and low, and which the Beasts of the Field have as much a Share in as Mankind : I say, if you will proceed in your Choice by any of these Measures, then we must certainly prevail upon you to follow St. Paul's Advice in the Text, you must set your *Affection on the Things above, and not on the Things on the Earth.*

But to convince you further of the absolute Necessity of so doing, if you have any Regard to your own Interests, there are two Considerations more to be laid before you, which are of greater Weight than all that has been hitherto represented ; tho' I can but just name them to you, not having now Time left to enlarge upon them.

VI. When the Competition lies between two Things, which of them we should afford the uppermost Place in our Esteem and Affection, and the greatest Share of our Care and Pains for the Acquisition of them, and it is made apparent to us that the one of them is so absolutely necessary to our Happiness in this World, that, if we have it not, we shall necessarily be miserable; but the other doth so little contribute to our Happiness, that we may do very well without it, at least we may do very well with such a Share of it, as we may certainly promise

promise to ourselves, if we do take Care to secure the other: I say, in this Case, who can avoid the preferring the former, and pitching upon it for our main End, rather than the latter. And yet truly thus stands the Case between *the Things of the Earth*, and *the Things above*. Spiritual Things, viz. Virtue and Piety, and the like, are such Goods, that without them it is impossible for a Man to be tolerably happy in this World, let his other Circumstances be never so prosperous. Tho' a Man had Success in all his temporal Designs, even according to his own Heart's Desire; tho' he was possessed of every Good that this World can afford him; yet such is the Frame of human Nature, and such likewise is the Constitution of Things in this World, that for all this the Man would not be easy; nay, as to many Periods of his Life, he would be very miserable, if devoid of Virtue and Goodness, and the Fear of God: Whereas on the other side, whoever is possessed of these, whoever is truly good, and makes it his main Business to serve and to please God, such a Man, for the most part, enjoys as much Happiness as the World can give: However, he can never be miserable, let Things happen to him as they will. If it please God to bestow upon him the common outward Comforts and Conveniencies of Life (as of all others such a
Man

Man most rarely misses of them, God having promised, that if we first *seek his Kingdom and the Righteousness thereof, all other Things shall be added unto us.*) Why, in this Case, the Man wants nothing to make him compleatly happy, as far as this State will allow of. But if he should be destitute even of these common Comforts we speak of, and God should think fit to exercise him with many Crosses and Afflictions, yet even in this Case the Man would be far from being miserable; he hath *that* within him which will for ever support him under all Trials of this Nature. And this is the Sum of my sixth Consideration, which indeed deserves a just Discourse by itself, in order to its being put into a clear Light. But,

VII. Lastly, to conclude all. What I have hitherto said, has been to shew, that if we aimed at no more than our present Well-being in this Life, it would be absolutely necessary that we should *set our Affections on the Things above, and not on the Things on the Earth.* But there is still a much weightier Argument to persuade us to this; and such a one, as if all the rest signified nothing, would have Force enough of itself to do it; nay, such Force, as no Man, in his Wits, can resist. And that, in plain *English* is this: If we set our Affec-
tions

tions on the Things of the Earth, how much Pleasure or Advantage soever we may promise to ourselves from them in this World, yet when we come to die, we shall not be a whit the better for them: Nay, so far from that, that we are lost, and undone, and miserable to Eternity, if we have not taken Care to secure to ourselves those spiritual Treasures I have been all along speaking of. Whereas on the contrary, if we *set our Affections on the Things above*, how slender a Provision soever we have made to ourselves of worldly Goods, yet by thus pitching our Designs, we purchase to ourselves *an everlasting In-¹ Pet. 5.4. heritance in the Heavens; a Crown of Glory that fadeth not away.* The perpetual Enjoyment of such Pleasures and Rewards, *as no Tongue can utter, nor the Mind of Man¹ Cor. 2.9. conceive of.*

There need no Words to set off this Argument. The plain State of the Matter is this. God sets before us *the Things of this Earth, and the Things above.* The one, as the Apostle tells us, *are temporal, the² Cor. 4.18. other eternal.* The one are for serving the Turns of this present Life, which is but of a short Continuance; the other last as long as our Souls, that is, for ever. The former are indeed present to us, and do more strongly affect those Powers in us, which in this corrupt State we are generally led by;

by; but yet the End of them is everlasting Damnation in Hell Fire, with the Devil and his Angels, supposing we have set our Hearts upon them to the Neglect of the other. The latter are indeed at a Distance, and we are not apt to have so vivid a Sense of them: But yet if we set our Hearts upon them, if we make the Purchase of them our principal Care and Pursuit, they will not leave us, either in this World or the other, but will secure to us the eternal Salvation both of our Souls and Bodies in the Kingdom of Heaven. And all this is true, or else all Religion is false.

This now being the true State of the Case between spiritual Things and temporal, between *the Things of the Earth and the Things above*, let every one, who hath common Sense, judge which of them he ought to *set his Affections on*, and lay out himself about.

I pray God to give us all Grace to act in this our great Concernment as reasonable Men should. If we do so, happy are we. Happy, no doubt, in a good Degree, even while we live in this World, but unspeakably happy when we leave it. For then

1 Pet. I. 11. *an Entrance shall be administred unto us into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord Jesus,*
 Heb. 12. *where, with all the holy Angels of God,*
 and all *the Spirits of just Men made perfect,*

Ser. 12. *Of Heavenly Affections.*

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we shall for ever live in perfect Peace and Joy, and sing everlasting Praises to him, who made us, and redeemed us, and hath *done more abundantly for us, than we could* Eph. 3. 20. *ask or think.*

To whom be all Honour and Glory,
henceforth and for ever.



SER-



SERMON XIII.

A Vindication of the just and innocent Use of Speech, from some Scruples which have been raised from two or three particular Texts.

EPHES. iv. 29.

Let no corrupt Communication proceed out of your Mouth, but that which is good, to the Use of Edifying, that it may minister Grace to the Hearers.



W H A T is it that St. Paul here means by *corrupt Communication*? Why certainly his Design was to caution Christians against all Filthiness, and Immodesty, and Lasciviousness in their Discourses. But tho' all impure and obscene Speeches be more especially a *corrupt Conversation*, and what, I believe, was chiefly meant

meant in this Text, yet we may, if we please, extend the Prohibition so, as to take into it all other Sorts of Speeches that are against good Manners, and contrary to the Laws of the Gospel.

Thus far we do readily grant the Prohibition may be extended. But this will not satisfy some Persons; for they are for carrying it much farther. There are some, who do not think it enough that Men should abstain from all Sorts of Speeches or Communication that is contrary to good Manners, but they think likewise, that every Christian is obliged to take Care, that all his Words, all his Conversation with others, should be so ordered as to have something in it that tends to the promoting of Religion; Something that makes for the spiritual Edification of those to whom he speaks. And whatever Speeches or Discourses are used in Conversation, that are not of this Nature, they account to be *corrupt Communication*. And this they gather from the Words of the Text, *Let no corrupt Communication proceed out of your Mouth, but that which is good, to the Use of Edifying, that it may minister Grace to the Hearers.*

And there are two other Texts in the New Testament, that seem to favour this Notion of theirs. One is, that Passage of our Saviour's, where he says, *That every* Mat. 12.
idle Word that Men shall speak, they shall 36.
give

give an Account thereof at the Day of Judgment. Now what is an *idle Word*, but such a Word as is unprofitable? Such a Word as doth not minister to Edification? The other Text is that of *St. Paul*, where he condemns not only *all Filthiness* in our Communication, but also *all foolish Talking* Eph. 5. 4. *and Jestings, as Things which are not convenient*. So that not only *idle* and unprofitable Words, but also all Sorts of Joking and *Jesting* are forbidden by the Apostle. Now we all know what *Jesting* means. It is the speaking Things, by way of Mirth and Drollery, for the Entertainment and Diversion of the Company. So that, according to these People's Interpretation of *St. Paul*, we are never in Conversation to speak any thing but what is grave and serious. And every thing that ministers only to Mirth and Pleasantness, tho' it be otherwise never so innocent, *is inconvenient*, as the Apostle styles it, that is, not to be practised by any Christian.

This is the Full of what is objected by the nicest and most scrupulous Sort of Persons, against the common Conversation of the World. And I must confess, these three Texts I have named, do, at the first Hearing, appear wonderfully strict and severe, and seem to carry that Sense which hath been now represented. And I do believe there are several honest and serious Christians among us, who taking them in this Sense,

Sense, are uneasy in their own Minds, and do daily accuse themselves as Offenders, because their Talk and Discourses do not come up to that Strictness which they fancy is enjoined by these Passages.

My present Design therefore is to vindicate the just and innocent Liberty which God hath allowed us in the Use of our Tongues, by giving an Account of these three Texts, which, as some People expound them, do really invade it.

But withal, I shall take Care to enforce the Practice of that which the Text I am now upon, in the true Sense of it, doth recommend to us. And this is the other Thing I propose to do in treating on this Argument.

I. But before I come to a particular Examination of these Texts, I must premise these two Things.

1. That it is a great Presumption against the Interpretation of these Texts, in that strict Sense we have mentioned, that if such an Interpretation be admitted, it will destroy some of the great Uses and Advantages of Speech among Mankind. For the Benefit of Speech was given us not only to help and forward one another in the Way that leads to eternal Life, (which must indeed be confessed is the great End of all) but it was given us also for the helping and forwarding one another in all

the Businesſes which are of a ſecular Concernment. Our Speech was given us for the ſame Purpoſes that all other worldly Bleſſings, and Talents, and Endowments are, *viz.* not only for the Buſineſs of Religion, but alſo for the ſerving all the other Deſigns we have in the World, that tend to the making our own Lives, or the Lives of others, eaſy, and convenient, and comfortable; as for Inſtance, for the maintaining of Commerce and Correſpondence one with another in Matters of Trade; for the managing all our civil Concernments to the beſt Advantage; for the endearing our ſelves to one another by mutual Friendſhip and Acquaintance, and the Payment of mutual Reſpects and Civilities; and, in Purſuance of this, for the diverting our Friends and Acquaintance, and the making each other's Condition as pleaſant and agreeable as we may. And in truth, I account that chearful and diverting Talk, (provided it be innocent) is as neceſſary to keep both ourſelves, and thoſe we converſe with, in Health and good Humour, and in a Fitneſs to perform all the Duties of human Life, whether they reſpect God, or our Neighbour, as any other Exerciſe or Recreation in the World. And if this Liberty of Talking pleaſantly (tho' not always to Edification) be denied to Mankind, and all Men thought ſo, and practiſed accordingly; the World in a little Time, inſtead of

of being a Place of human Society, would be turned into a Den of Mopes and Hypochondriacks. This is the first Presumption against the strict way of interpreting these Texts.

2. But there is another Thing that doth as much make against it; *viz.* That really, according to these Interpretations, the Texts are not practicable. Devout People may fancy what they please about all our Speeches tending to Edification; but in truth it is all Speculation. I never yet knew or heard of any Persons (who were not under the Disorders of Hypochondriack Melancholy) so grave or serious, or severe in their Conversation, but, upon Occasion, have allowed themselves the Liberty of talking an hundred Things, which would not comport with the Strictness of this Rule. So that even the devoutest of Men should not interpret these Texts of Scripture to the Sense before mentioned, and should not make this Interpretation the Rule of their Words and Discourses. They must, I doubt, every Night go to Rest with a troubled and uneasy Conscience, for the Communication they have had that Day, as necessarily believing that they have that Day offended God in their Discourses. There is indeed the Example of our Lord Jesus urged against this; of whom we read in Scripture, that he several times *wept*; but it is not recorded there

that he ever laughed. But if you will well attend to it, there is no great Force in this. Doth it therefore follow, that because no Mention is made of our Saviour's laughing, that therefore he never laughed? We may, by the same Logick, conclude, that he never went to Bed, because we find no Mention of it in the holy Scriptures. But in truth, from the Character that is given of our Saviour in Scripture, one would rather believe the contrary to this was true, and that he was not so sullen and morose a Person, as this Objection would represent him; but rather that he was a Man of great Benignity, and Pleasantness, and Sociableness in his Conversation, witness his frequent vouchsafing his Presence at Feasts and Entertainments; insomuch, as he himself tells us, that whereas *John the Baptist* was accused to have a *Devil* (that is, to be a disturbed Hypochondriack) upon Account of his Reservedness, he, our Saviour, went under the Character of a *Glutton or a Wine-bibber*, upon Account of the Freedom of his Conversation.

Matt. 11.
18, 19.

Having premised these two Things, I now come to consider the Texts themselves; and I shall give an Account of them one by one.

First, And I begin with that of our Saviour's in *Matt. xii. 36. I say unto you, that every idle Word that Men shall speak, they shall*

shall give account thereof in the Day of Judgment.

The Difficulty here is to know what our Lord means by *idle Words*. We commonly think, as I said, every unprofitable Word, that doth not tend to some serious Purpose, is an *idle Word*. But I believe, upon Examination, it will be found, that the *ἄργον ῥῆμα*, the *idle Word* here spoken of, hath a quite different Sense. The true Way to know our Saviour's Meaning, is to look back to what goes before, to attend to the Occasion upon which he spoke these Words, and the Scope and Design he had in speaking of them. Now it is plain, that our Saviour is here treating about that which we commonly call the Sin against the Holy Ghost. The *Pharisees* had said, *This Fellow doth not cast out Devils but by Beelzebub the Prince of Devils*. Our Saviour takes notice of this Saying of theirs, and first of all, by clear Arguments and Demonstrations, shews, that this was a mere Calumny, a mere Slander of theirs. And that it was impossible, all Things consider'd, that he should cast out Devils, and do his other Miracles by any other Power than the Spirit of God. And this is the Effect of all his Discourse in the next six Verses, viz. from the 24th to the 31st. He then comes, in the second Place, to declare against the Greatness and Danger of the Sin they were guilty of, in thus maliciously traducing his Miracles, and saying that he

v. 24.

v. 31. did them by the Power of the Devil. And this he doth in the two next Verses, *I say unto you, that all manner of Sin and Blasphemy (viz. all manner of Calumny and Slander) shall be forgiven unto Men, but the Blasphemy (the Calumny and Slander) against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto Men.*
 v. 32. Further, *Whosoever, says he, speaketh a Word against the Son of Man* (that is, against Jesus Christ, as to his personal Qualifications, as for Instance, calling him a Glutton or a Wine-bibber) *it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost (viz. whosoever blasphemes the Miracles that I do by the Power of the Holy Spirit of God, and attributes them to the Devil, this Blasphemy and Calumny is of so high a Nature, that) it shall never be forgiven him, neither in this World, nor in the other.* After this he goes on in the three next Verses, further to vindicate his Miracles from those Aspersions, and to declare against their horrible Hypocrisy in thus slandering them. And then in the next Verse come in these Words I am now speaking of, *But I say unto you, that every idle Word that Men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the Day of Judgment.* Thus come in the Words, upon this Occasion, and in Pursuance of the former Discourse. I will now appeal to any one, who knows any thing of the Laws of Discourse, whether it be not plain, that our
 Saviour

Saviour in this Expression of his, of giving Account at the Day of Judgment for *idle Words*, hath not Reference to such kind of Words, as he had all this while been talking of; viz. such Words as the *Pharisees* spoke, when they said *that he cast out Devils by Beelzebub the Prince of Devils*. Certainly this is as evident from the Connexion of one Part of our Saviour's Discourse with the rest, as any thing can be. And if we will not make our Saviour to speak inconsistently, and to talk against the Rules of Talking, we must acknowledge, that the Words which he here calls *idle Words*, must be such false, malicious, slanderous Words, as he hath all this time been reproving the *Pharisees* for.

Well; but it will be said, that this Account of the Text doth indeed suit very well with the Occasion, and with the Context; but yet it seems not to suit with the Terms here used. Our Saviour doth not say, that for every Slander or Calumny that Men shall speak, they shall give Account, but for *every idle Word they shall speak*. To this I answer, that if the Sense of *idle Words*, in the Language that our Saviour spoke, must necessarily have been the same with the Sense of *idle Words* in our Language, this would be a considerable Objection. But it is plain it is not so. *Idle Words* in the *Jewish* Language, do often import a great deal more than useless

and unprofitable Words, viz. *false and lying Words*. To give a few Instances of this: We are forbid in the third Commandment,
 Exod. 20. *to take the Name of God idly, or in vain.*
 7. (for it is indifferent which of these Ways we render the *Hebrew Word*) But, now the Sense of that (as our Saviour himself expounds it) is, thou shalt not take God's
 Mat. 5.33. Name into thy Mouth falsely, *thou shalt not forswear thyself.* And thus in the Book of *Proverbs*, *idle Words* are made to be the same thing with *lying Words*. And thus
 c. 5. v. 6. likewise in the Epistle to the *Ephesians*, *Let no Man deceive you with vain or idle Words.* The plain Sense is, *Let no Man deceive you with false or lying Words.* And thus in the Old Testament, where the Gods of the Heathens are called *vain or idle Gods*, the Sense is, that they are *false Gods*. So that in the very Nature of the Expression, a great deal more may be imported in the Term of *idle Words*, than barely useless, unprofitable, unedifying Words. And where the Scope and Design of the Discourse carries it to more (as it doth plainly here) more undoubtedly is to be understood by that Term. The Sum of this Point is this, the *idle Words* which we shall give account for, are *false and slanderous Words*; or, if you will, any sort of Words which savour of a *corrupt Communication*, any Words that violate the Laws of Morality; But by no means such Words as
 are

are innocent, and in which no Harm is meant, and by which no Harm is done; tho' perhaps they do not serve to any great Purpose either of spiritual or temporal Improvement or Advantage. And thus much let it suffice to have spoken of the first Text.

Secondly, The next I will give an Account of, is that of St. Paul, *Eph. v. 4.* He, in the Verse before, having exhorted the *Ephesians, that Fornication and all Unclean-ness might not so much as be named among them, as becometh Saints*, adds in this Verse, *neither Filthiness, nor foolish Talking or Jestings*. Here now seems to be a terrible Check and Rebuke given to all that we call Mirth, or Wit, or Railery, or good Humour in Conversation; for all *that* comes under the Notion of Jestings, as we use the Word. So that if Jestings is forbidden, God forgive most of the Conversation of this World, tho' otherwise never so innocent. But I think I need say no more to convince you, that this is not the true Meaning of the Text, than only to give you Dr. *Hammond's* Account of it, who was indeed himself one of the gravest severest Men that perhaps his Age bred. He takes notice that *μωρολογία* and *εὐτεραπελία* (which are the Words here used, and which we render *foolish Talking and Jestings*) are in this Place so joined together, that the latter Word is only an Explanation of the former.

former. For the Apostle, speaking of several other Things that are not to be named among Christians, mentions, among the rest, foolish Talking *or* Jestling. He doth not say foolish Talking *and* Jestling, which would make them two distinct Things; but foolish Talking *or* Jestling, which makes the latter Word only an Explication of that which goes before. He observes likewise further, that *μωρολογία*, which we render *foolish Talking*, (but if strictly interpreted, would signify *speaking Folly*) is, in the Language of Scripture, such kind of Talking, as tends to Lewdness and Uncleanness; as to commit Folly in the sacred Language is the same thing as to commit Fornication or Adultery. And consequently the latter Word, *Jestling*, means the same thing, only with this Difference, that *μωρολογία* is speaking lewdly in general, but *εὐτεταπείλια*, or *Jestling*, is speaking lewdly, by way of Jest, with a Design to move Laughter, for that is the Importance of the Word. He therefore concludes, that both these Words, *foolish Talking* and *Jestling*, are not to be taken in the full Latitude that they signify in our Language, but are to be confined to such kind of Talk or Discourse, as is impure, and smutty, and obscene. And this Conclusion of his he confirms from two Things: First, from the Company that these are set with, *viz.* Uncleanness, Fornication, Inordinate Lust, (which

(which is more proper than Covetousness) and Filthiness, which are named immediately before. And secondly, and more especially, from the Reason that is given, why these Things should *not* be named among Christians in the Words following; and that is this: *For this you know*, says the Apostle, *that no Whoremonger, or unclean Person, or inordinate Luster, who is an Idolater* (for so the Words are more intelligibly rendered than by *covetous Man, who is an Idolater*) *both any Inheritance in the Kingdom of Christ and of God.* Here is a Reason given why none of those Things before mentioned *should be named among Christians.* It follows therefore, that *foolish Talking and Jesting*, which are one of the Things mentioned, must be of the same Sort with the rest of the Things, *viz.* must fall under some Head of Uncleanness, otherwise the Reason here given would not reach them, and consequently would not answer to the Exhortation. I think this is a very plain Account of this Passage, and that there needs no more to be said about it.

Thirdly, Well, but the Difficulty about the Liberty of Speech is not yet over. However we get off from this Text, yet what can be said to the other Passage of St. Paul, which I have at present made my Text. The Apostle, in this Place, doth not only caution us, that *no corrupt Communication should proceed out of our Mouths*, but he also exhorts,

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Vid. Ham-
mond's

Note on
Rom. 1.29.

v. 5.

Walsingham

exhorts, that we should in all our Conversation *Speak that which is good to the Use of Edifying, that it may minister Grace unto the Hearers.*

What is meant by this? Is it not plain from hence, that no Words ought to pass our Lips but such as tend to Edification, such as minister Grace to the Hearers? Well, this Text I shall now, in the last Place, consider.

1st. And first of all I desire it may be taken notice of, that let the Sense of these Words be what it will, yet they are always to be understood with this Proviso, *viz.* supposing we have Ability, and Convenience, and Opportunity. A Man cannot always speak that which tends *to the Use of Edifying.* For in many Cases perhaps it is above his Reach. But if he could, oftentimes the Nature of the Conversation, or the Circumstances of the Company, would not bear it. In either of these Cases now I hope a Man doth not transgress the Apostle's Rule, when he doth not speak such Things *as minister Grace to the Hearers*, whatsoever be the Meaning of that Phrase. It is plain that the Apostle doth not require of us that our Speeches should *always* be for Edification, and that they should *always* minister Grace unto the Hearers; for there is no such Word as *always* in the Text: and indeed, the Thing itself is impossible, and therefore

fore certainly he doth not *always* condemn us when our Speeches are not so. But this is that which he exhorts us to, as we have Ability, and as we have Opportunity put into our Hands; that we should make use of them for the Purposes of edifying our Brethren, that our Discourse *may minister Grace to the Hearers*. Our Communication is lawful and allowable, tho' it do not *minister to Edification*, provided it be innocent. But it is then praise-worthy, and suitable to the Excellency of that Religion we have taken upon us, when we make it useful and edifying to others. And this we ought to do as often as we can. This, I take it, is the general Sense of the Apostle's Words.

2dly. But, secondly, let us a little more particularly consider this Text. And here two Things are to be enquired into

First, What is here meant by the Phrase *to the Use of edifying*.—Secondly, What is meant by the Phrase *of ministering Grace to the Hearers*.

(1.) As to the first, the Answer is short, viz. That when the Apostle exhorts that our *Communication should be such as is good, to the Use of edifying*, that Phrase imports no more than this, that which *is good to the Use of Instruction*, or that which is good to *the Instruction of Use*; for both these Ways the Words may be render'd: That is to say, (as most Expositors explain it) *Let your*

your Speech be such as tends to that useful Instruction, that every Body you converse with have need of, or occasion for. Or thus, Let your Speech be pertinent, and someways fitting the Needs and Exigencies of those you have to deal with. This, I think, is the full Sense of the former Phrase.

(2.) And then, in the second Place, as for the latter, *viz. that it may minister Grace to the Hearers*, Grotius's Note here is, *that you may deserve well of your Hearers, by being useful to them.* Dr. Hammond's Note is, *that your Speech may bring Advantage to them who hear you.* So that in truth, all that is meant and enjoined by this Text comes to this, (I give it you in the Words of another excellent Expositor of holy Scripture, *viz. Vorstius*) *Let no corrupt or vicious Communication proceed out of your Mouth, but that which is useful and pertinent, as there is Occasion, that so not only your Speech may be acceptable to, and well received by them who hear it, but may also, some Way or other, profit them, and be of Advantage to them.*

This, I verily believe, is both the true and the full Sense and Importance of these Words. It is not here said that our Speech ought always to be serious, much less that it ought always to be about Matters of Religion, or always to tend to spiritual Edification; but that it always ought to be pertinent and proper to the present Occasion:

caſion: And, as far the Occaſion will bear, it ſhould be uſeful and inſtructive to thoſe who hear it, ſo as that they may receive ſome Benefit, ſome Advantage from our Diſcourſes, more or leſs, according as our own Talents and Abilities, or the Circumſtances of the Company, or the Nature of the Buſineſs before us do give us Opportunity.

And if ſo, I appeal to any one, whether the moſt ſcrupulous Perſon have any juſt Reaſon from this Text, to be afraid of any harmleſs Mirth, and Pleaſantneſs, and Freedom in Converſation; or to think himſelf, upon Account thereof, obliged to talk nothing but what is grave and ſerious.

And thus I have vindicated the innocent Liberties of common Converſation from the Objections which ſome devout, but melancholy Perſons are apt to make againſt them.

II. But I muſt not leave the Matter thus: The Exhortation in my Text is of too great Moment to be ſlightly paſſed over; and therefore I ſhall proceed now, by way of Application, to inforce the Practice of that which the Text, in the true Senſe of it, recommends to us: *Let no corrupt Communication, ſays St. Paul, proceed out of your Mouth, but that which is good to the Uſe of edifying, that it may miniſter Grace to the Hearers.*

Now

Now to the observing this Rule, it is supposed, not only that we have laid aside all vicious and corrupt Communication, that we have got over the common Faults of Mankind in their Discourses, *viz.* that we never talk unlawful forbidden Things, and that none of our Conversation is either against Truth, or Charity, or Piety, or Purity, which is the corrupt Communication that is prohibited by the Laws of Christ. But, I say, if we would observe this Rule, it is supposed further, that we make it one of the great Businessses of our Conversation to do all the Good we can; to help, and profit, and be useful to all we converse with in all the Ways which are in our Power. Now there is no Man living, who is not a Natural or a Lunatick, but is some way or other capable of practising this Rule in his Conversation; at least at some Times. He is an odd sort of Man, whatever his Education, or Profession, or Circumstances be, who cannot sometimes do Service by his Communication to those he converseth with; (tho' otherwise much wiser than himself) either by teaching them something which he knows better than they, or informing them in something which it concerns them to know, and yet they cannot come to the Knowledge of it without that Information. But as for those upon whom God hath bestowed any considerable Degree of Parts
and

and Talents, and especially where those Parts have been improved by Education or Experience; they ought to remember that God hath bestowed these Blessings upon them not for their own Sakes only, but that they might be Instruments of doing Good to Mankind by their Communication. It is in their Power, if they will, to make the most common Discourses they are engaged in, some way or other useful and beneficial to the Hearers. And certainly, if all such Persons would once try this way of Conversation, viz. to talk as usefully as they can to the Company they are engaged in (in what Way soever it be) they would soon find the Comfort of it.

There is no Doubt but that every Night, when they come on their Pillows to reflect on the Actions of the Day past, (as I believe Men generally do not sleep so soundly, but, whether they will or no, they make some Reflections) they would find a great deal of Pleasure in being able to satisfy themselves, that that Day hath not been spent unprofitably. Tho' they have been engaged in several Sorts of Conversation, yet they have endeavoured that their Talk should not have been altogether useless and impertinent. They have, some way or other, bettered the Company, either by their Notions, or Instructions, or by their Advices and Cautions. This that I now say, hath Reference to all Sorts of useful

Talk wherein the Life of Men is concerned, whether it be in Matters of Trade, or Arts, or Sciences; or with respect to Mens Manners, or their civil and domestick Concernments.

But there is one Sort of useful Talk, which, I think, I ought to press a little more particularly upon this Occasion, and that is, in the Points of Piety and Religion. Which I believe my Text hath a particular Respect to, tho' it ought not to be confined to them. St. Paul says, that *all our Communication should be good to the Use of edifying*. I do not gather from hence, that all our Discourse ought to be about spiritual Matters, or otherwise it is a corrupt Communication, for this is the Thing I have been all this while confuting: But this is that which I say, Certainly spiritual Things ought not to be wholly passed by in our common Conversation. On the contrary, we ought to take all Occasions to speak of them, this being the best and the noblest Theme that we can employ our Speech about, and that which most tends to the Benefit of others.

Pray hear what our Apostle saith in another Place: *Let the Word of Christ, says he, dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in Psalms, and Hymns, and spiritual Songs, singing with Grace in your Hearts to the Lord.* These Words import, that as we should always have a deep

deep Sense of Religion in our Hearts, so we should be endeavouring to impress it upon others. That we should not only be fully possessed ourselves with an intire Esteem and Love of the Gospel of Christ, and a thankful Heart to God for all his Benefits, but that we should make it our Business to infuse the same Spirit of Devotion into the Minds of all we converse with.

Oh, what a world of Good might we do, if we would but thus manage our Conversation among Men! It is not my Meaning here to encourage any one in a religious Cant, or in a Course of using Scripture Expressions in their common Discourses, or to advise any one to be always talking about spiritual Matters, whether seasonably or unseasonably. But this I say, It would become us all, in our several Stations, to do as much Good as we can. And therefore, where-ever Occasion offers itself, if we can pertinently cast in any thing in our Discourse, that either tends to the impressing on our Company a Sense of God, or to the confirming them in a Belief of Christianity, or to the amending any Defect we see in them, or to the arousing them to a more hearty lively Exercise of Devotion, we should do extremely well to take the Opportunity.

This I am confident of, that if the devout and serious Men among us, they who

have a hearty Sense of Religion, (tho' the Number of them be but small in Comparison of the rest of Mankind) would but make it their Business in all their Conversation heartily to stand up for the Interests of God and Virtue, as Opportunity fairly leads them to it, by discouraging Vice, and Immorality, and Infidelity, where-ever they may decently do it; and by taking all Occasions of recommending the Practice of Holiness and Virtue, we should, in a little Time, see a much better World; nor would Atheism, Profaneness and Irreligion be able to bear up and support itself against the irresistible Evidence of Truth.

But, alas! we think not much of these Things. It is enough for us that we say our Prayers in our Closets, and have an inward Reverence for God and Religion. But as for the concerning ourselves about it in our Conversation, there we are to be excused. We do very well, and as much as we can hope for, if we can avoid the Vices and Irregularities of Discourse: But to talk of promoting Piety, *that* doth not belong to us. But why should Piety be banished all our Discourse? Why should we not take occasion to mingle something of *that* in our common Conversation, as well as those many impertinent Things that come into our Heads? Are not the Arguments of Religion; are not the Being of a God and his Providence, and the Truth
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and Excellence of Christ's Religion; are not the unexceptionable Reasonableness of Virtue and Holiness, and the infinite eternal Rewards we may attain to thereby; I say, Are not these Things of as great Concernment to us, as the Fashion of our Apparel, or a new Play, or a Story of an Amour, or how such a Person managed in such an Affair, or how Things go at Court, or what Account the foreign Letters give of the Transactions abroad? I say, Are not the former Things a thousand times of more Concernment to us than these? Nay, and are they not more proper, and every way more fit for us to talk of? Nay, I will add further, Are they not more delightful and entertaining to any well-disposed Person, than the other? There is not the least Doubt of it. All that is to be said, is, that there is Custom for the one, but not for the other. But why should evil and unreasonable Customs be kept up, especially when so much Good would accrue to Mankind from the breaking of them? I declare all this time I am not for a preaching, canting Conversation. I would have no one break the Rules of common Decency, for the sake of talking religiously out of Season. The Thing I recommend, is to be managed with Prudence; and chiefly I propose it in such Conversations, where there is an entire Friendship and Intimacy. Here, I say, especially lies our

Opportunity of doing much Good to one another by our Discourses. Here we may, without the Imputation of Singularity or Affectation, mingle most serious savoury Things with our common Talk: Here we have Opportunity of instructing one another in Matters of Salvation; of reproveing one another for our Faults; of exhorting one another to a serious Regard to our eternal Interests; of exciting one another to grow more and more in all Goodness and Virtue. Here we may, without ill Manners, warm one anothers Hearts, by recounting God's innumerable Favours to us, by setting forth his Praise, and declaring his most wonderful Works, and comforting one another with the Promises he hath given us in being our God, and making us Heirs of eternal Life.

And this let me say further, for the Encouragement of all pious Persons in this religious Communication, viz. That they can seldom use any of this Discourse in good Earnest, but it will have some good Effect. Though their Friends, to whom it is spoken, do not seem at present to be much wrought upon by it, yet it is not wholly lost upon them. They think of it afterwards, and, in all Probability, it proves either a Step to their Conversion, or at least a Check to their further proceeding in Wickedness. I doubt not, but all religious Talk, if it be warm, and withal prudent,

prudent, is as much catching, and doth as much Execution towards the making Men good, as the corrupt and profligate Conversation of the World doth towards the making them bad. And yet the Efficacy and Mischief of *that*, we all are sufficiently sensible, and have too great Reason to complain of.



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SERMON XIV.

JAMES i. 13.

Let no Man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with Evil, neither tempteth he any Man.



THAT which I design to treat upon from this Text is this; *How far God is concerned in the Temptations to Sin which happen to Mankind.* To which I shall, without any further Preface, apply myself, and have four Things to offer, or four Propositions to lay down about this Point, which will take in all that is needful for the explaining the Doctrine of St. James in my Text, of *God's tempting no Man*, and reconciling it with other Scriptures, where it is said that *God doth tempt Men*; and also afford us useful Matter for practical Application.

I. The

I. The first Proposition I lay down about God tempting Men, is this:

If we take Temptation for the making of a Trial of Mens inward Qualities and Dispositions, (as the Word is sometimes taken in that Latitude) then it is very certain that *God doth tempt Men.* For he often so dispenseth his Providence towards them, and puts them into those Circumstances, rather than others, on purpose to prove the Frame and Temper of their Minds, how they stand to him. What I now say is perfectly the Language of Scripture, as to this Matter. There we meet with two Sorts of Temptations, wherewith God is said to tempt his Servants; the one by Words, the other by Deeds. Of the former Kind we have but one Instance, but it is a remarkable one; and that is God's tempting of *Abraham*, by laying a Command upon him to offer up his only Son in Sacrifice to him. Thus *Gen. xxii. 1.* *And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, saying, Take now thy Son, thine only Son Isaac, and get thee into the Land of Moriah, and offer him there for a Burnt-offering upon one of the Mountains that I shall shew thee.* Now what End this Temptation was for (or at least one of the Ends) appears by the 12th Verse, where, after *Abraham* had put all things in Readiness

ness towards the fulfilling of God's Command, he tells him, *Now I know*, says he, *that thou fearest God, since thou hast not withheld thy Son, thine only Son from me.* Here was a strange Trial of Abraham's Obedience; he is commanded by God to do that which God himself had no Mind should be done, as the Event shewed. But this was an Instance of God's Temptation, which stands alone by itself, and there is nothing like it in the whole Scripture. And it may be questioned, whether any Man in the World, besides *Abraham*, was ever thus tempted.

And as for the other Way of tempting Men, viz. by his Dealings with them, or by the Dispensations of his Providence towards them, there are abundance of Instances to be given of it in Scripture. Thus Deut. 8. 2. *Moses* tells the Children of *Israel*, that all his Dealings with them in the Wilderness for forty Years, was for the tempting of them, to know what was in their Hearts, and whether they would keep his Commandments or no. And in *Exodus*, when the People were in a great Consternation at the Thundring and Lightnings, and other Manifestations of God's Presence, which they had heard and seen in the Mount, *Moses* saith Exod. 20. unto them, *Fear not, for God is come to tempt you, and that his Fear may be before your Face, that ye sin not.* And lastly, to name

name no more Texts, when *Moses* had told the People of the arising of false Prophets among them, that would endeavour to seduce them to Idolatry, by the Means of the great Signs and Wonders that they would work for the Confirmation of their wicked Doctrines; yet for all that, saith he, *Thou shalt not hearken unto the Words of those Prophets, for the Lord your God doth hereby tempt you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your Heart, and with all your Soul.* Deut. 13.3

In some of these Texts our *English* Translation reads *proving* instead of *tempting*. But the Original Word is the same in all; and it is the Word which, when it is refer'd to other Persons besides God, is always render'd *tempting*. It is certain then, that God in his Providence doth frequently tempt Men; that is to say, puts them into this or the other Condition, or suffers this or the other Event to fall upon them, for the trying of their Virtue, for the proving their Fidelity, and Patience, and Courage, and Constancy, and the like.

And this it is fit we should all seriously reflect upon, and apply to ourselves, especially when any unusual extraordinary Event of Divine Providence, whether good or bad, is dispensed to us. For even the happy, prosperous Circumstances of our Lives (as we account them) may be many times ordered in the way of Temptation to us,

us, that is, for the Trial of our Virtue and Adherence to God. But the bad are certainly Temptations, and accordingly have that Name in the Scriptures. Thus in the 2d Verse of that very Chapter where my Text is, *Count it all Joy, says the Apostle, when ye fall into divers Temptations, viz. Afflictions, knowing that the Trial of your Faith worketh Patience.* And again, 1 Pet. vi. 7. *Ye are now in Heaviness through manifold Temptations, that the Trial of your Faith may be found to Praise, and Honour, and Glory, in the Day when Jesus Christ shall be revealed.*

This is the Scripture Account of these Matters. But here a Question may arise: You say that God, in these Dispensations of his Providence, makes Trial or Experiment whether Men be good or bad. But to what Purpose is this? God knows that beforehand. He knows certainly not only what every Man can do, but what every Man will do, when he is placed in such and such Circumstances. And therefore to talk of trying or proving Mens Virtue, by these Methods, seems a needless Thing.

To this I answer, that it is true God knows so well what is in Man, that he needs not make any Experiment upon him for the satisfying himself about his Behaviour in any Contingency. And therefore it is certain, that these Trials, Proofs, or Experiments (as the Scripture calls them)

are

are not made for the satisfying God, but for other wise, and virtuous, and good Ends. And tho' the Phrase in Scripture be such as seems to intimate that God sends these Temptations, *that he may know whether they, who are exercised by them, do bear an honest Mind towards him, yet undoubtedly, this is said ἀνδρωποτάδως, as the Divines speak; that is to say, these are Forms of Speech borrowed from our Dealings one with another; as God is said to* Gen. 18: 21.
go down and enquire whether the Wickedness of Sodom was really so great as the Cry thereof. And abundance of such Idioms we have in Scripture. Indeed, I may say, that almost the whole Language of the Old Testament, with relation to God, is of that Kind. But the true Sense and Importance of these Passages, is no more than this: That these kind of Dispensations of God's Providence to Men, are great Exercoises of their Virtue, and great Proofs, whereby they may evidence, both to themselves and those about them, that they are what they pretend to be; and lastly, great Occasions of Benefits and Advantages, both to themselves and others. They are indeed truly and properly Trials and Experiments, because a Man is truly and properly experimented by them. But then, the End of this is not to instruct God, or to make him certain of that which he was uncertain of before; but partly to instruct Men what they

they are to think of themselves, and what others are to think of them, (which, without these Trials, they would not have been able to do) and partly to bring a great deal of Good to the World, and to those Persons in particular, who are exercised by these Trials.

Two Inferences, by way of Application, I desire to draw from what has been said upon this Point, before I go any further.

First, Let us from hence be instructed never to judge of God's Love or Hatred to Persons by the outward Circumstances that do befall them. Do not conclude, because thou art more fortunate in this World than thy Neighbour; because thou art, by strange uncommon Accidents, advanced, as to thy outward Condition; because thou art blessed in thy Basket and in thy Store, in thy Family and in thy Relations, above thine own Expectations, or the ordinary Successes of other Mens Endeavours: I say, Do not conclude from hence, that therefore thou art a greater Favourite of God's, than they who have not sped so well. Oh! this is a very false Way of Arguing. God might have a great many other Ends to serve by these Dispensations of his Providence towards thee, different from those thou dreamest of. And perhaps this was one: He meant, that these happy Circumstances (as thou accountest them) should be sent unto thee by way of Temptation;

tation; that they should be Trials and Experiments of thy Virtue; and according as thou didst use them, or behave thyself under them, so should they prove a Blessing or a Curse to thee. If thou bearest thyself with an even and composed Mind, and makest use of those Advantages thou hast above other Men for the doing more Good in the World than other Men, and in the midst of thy Prosperity neither vainly pleatest thyself, nor despise others, but walkest reverently and humbly with thy God in all thy Conversation, then thou hast some Reason to conclude, that these Things are really a Blessing to thee, for thou acquittest thyself under these Trials as thou shouldest do; and there is no Doubt but thy Virtue will be approved by God, as well as commended by Men; and thy splendid Circumstances will never so rise up in Judgment against thee another Day, as to occasion that heavy Sentence that was passed upon the rich Man in the Gospel, (which, in Truth, should make every rich or great Man to tremble when he thinks of it) *Son, remember that thou in thy Life-time receivedst thy good Things, and likewise Lazarus evil Things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.* Luke 16. 25.

But, on the other side, if thy Prosperity tempt thee to Pride and Insolence, to the Forgetfulness of God, and the Contempt of Men; if thou usest the Advantage of thy Power

Power to oppress the Weak, and of thy Wit to over-reach the Simple, and of thy Wealth to minister to the Purposes of Vice and Luxury, *to make Provision for the Flesh to fulfil the Lusts thereof*; then thy great Successes, by which thou measurest God's Love to thee, are not a Blessing (however they were intended) but a Curse. God hath thought fit to try thee in those soft and pleasing Ways, and thy Virtue hath not been strong enough to abide the Trial; but thou art found reprobate.

Again, Do not conclude, because God suffers thee to fall into many Difficulties and Afflictions; because thou art pressed with hard and pinching Circumstances; because thou art visited with sad and grievous Losses, or with long and painful Sickness, or with the Death or Miscarriage of thy nearest Relations, or the like heavy Misfortunes: Do not, I say, conclude from hence that God is angry with thee, or that he hath no Kindness for thee: No; these are no greater Marks of God's Displeasure, than the other Instances I before mentioned were of his Favour. The best of his Children he thinks fit to exercise in this Way. And tho' these Chastisements may sometimes truly enough be said to have the Nature of Punishments and Corrections for something that is amiss in us, yet it is certain they are Trials also, Experiments which he makes of us, whether we so heartily cleave

cleave to him with our whole Souls as we pretend to do, and as we ought to do. And therefore,

Which is the Second Inference I draw from this Discourse, we ought not only not to repine when such Temptations as these are cast in our Way, but to rejoice under them, and be thankful for them. *Count it* James 1. 2,

all Joy, says the Apostle, when ye fall into divers Temptations ; for assuredly there is no Harm meant to thee, or any body else, by these severe Usages, but on the contrary a great deal of Good. For God, as St. Paul Heb. 12,

tells us, deals not with us as the Fathers of our Flesh often do, who chasten us for their own Pleasure ; but he doth it for our Profit, that we might be Partakers of his Holiness.

God takes no Pleasure in seeing thee, or any of his Creatures, uneasy, or in hard and difficult Circumstances ; for it is not in his Nature willingly to grieve and afflict the Children of Men. But thy Good, and the World's Good, require that thou shouldest be thus exercised. A great many excellent Ends, both for thy Benefit and the Benefit of others, were intended by these Dispensations of Providence to thee, which I have not now Time to dilate upon. Thou wast not, perchance, so careful and diligent about thy Duty as thou shouldest have been, and therefore it was fit that thou shouldest, by some sharp Affliction, be awaken'd and aroused to a Sense of it. Thy Heart and

Afflictions, it is like, were too much engrossed by those earthly Goods thou didst enjoy ; and therefore, in Kindness to thee, God took them away, that thou mightest be brought to a more entire Dependance on him, and a closer Walking with him. There was this or the other Lust remained unmortified in thee, which occasion'd thy making many false Steps in the Way of God's Commandments. But by the Chastisements which are sent unto thee (which are generally so proportioned to our Faults, that they may be said to bear the Characters or Signatures of them) thou mayst be taught to walk more evenly and circumspectly. And this Lesson *David* tells us, he learned no where so well as in the School of Afflictions ; *Till I was afflicted* (says he) *I went wrong ; but now have I kept thy Word.*

Psal. 119.
67.

But admit there was no great Matter amiss in thy Heart or in thy Conversation, so that thy Sufferings have not properly the Notion of Chastisements or Corrections, (but, Oh God, where is the Man that lives so innocently as to be able to think so of himself?) But admit that thou didst live without Blame, yet is it any Harm to thee that thou hast Opportunities put into thy Hands of improving thy Virtues and good Qualities? Is it not for thy Advantage that God will not suffer thee to content thyself with the ordinary Attainments of common Christians,

Christians, but trains thee up in such a Discipline, as thou must be necessarily put upon a constant Exercise of all thy Virtues, especially the more noble ones, of Patience and Fortitude, and Contempt of the World, and absolute Resignation to God; that by this Means thou mightest make a greater Proficiency than ordinary in all divine Graces; that by this Means the Trial of thy Faith might be found honourable and glorious; and lastly, that by this Means thou mightest be made conformable to the Example of thy Saviour, who was made *perfect by Sufferings*. And who knows likewise but God may exercise thee thus for the sake of other Men? Examples of those Virtues which are chiefly seen and expressed in afflicted Circumstances, as they are most naked to the World; so where-ever they are given, they seem to be most instructive, and most effectual for the working upon those who are Spectators of them. God therefore, by putting thee to combat with more than ordinary Difficulties, it is likely meant and design'd thee for a publick Benefit: He hath brought thee, as it were, upon a Stage, that others may behold thy Carriage and Behaviour under thy Afflictions, and take Pattern from thee how they are to behave themselves when they are tempted, and to instruct them what Degrees of Virtue are in this Life to be attained, and should by good Men be aspired

after. And sure, in all this, there is no Unkindness meant thee, but a great and signal Favour; for by these Trials thou comest to know thyself, which, without them, thou couldst not have done. Thou hast now some Experience of the Reality of those Pretensions thou makest to Piety and Virtue. Thou canst now, with a great deal of Satisfaction, evidence to thyself, that thou art in Deed, and in Truth, what thou didst profess, a Follower of Christ Jesus in all the Ways that he went before thee. And therefore, since thy Faith and Virtue did not fail thee in the Day of Temptation, what hast thou to do, but to reflect upon thine own Condition with a great deal of Pleasure and Joy. How much Ease and Peace will this very Consideration bring to thy Mind? Thou hast been tempted, and thou art found faithful. No Happiness, no Enjoyment in this World, can yield a thousandth Part of that Pleasure and Comfort that this very Reflection will afford to thee.

Which will be further heighten'd, when thou considerest that all the Temptations of this kind that it shall please God to try thee with, do not only serve to confirm thy present Hope of Happiness, but shall extremely tend to the Increase of thy Rewards, when the righteous Judge of the World shall come to make Retribution to Mankind for what they have done in the
Flesh.

Flesh. At that Day shalt thou bleſs God moſt heartily for every thing that hath come croſs to thee, or wherein thou haſt been tempted; *For theſe ſhort Afflictions,* ^{2 Cor. 4: 10.} as the Apoſtle ſpeaks, *which are but for a Moment,* will work for thee a far more exceeding and eternal Weight of Glory. This is, in ſome meaſure, true of all Afflictions and Sufferings of God's ſending, that are patiently and chriſtianly born. But if the Sufferings that God calls thee out unto be for the ſake of Virtue and a good Conſcience, or for the Name of Jeſus Chriſt, then we may uſe our Saviour's Words in the 6th of St. Luke, *Rejoyce, O Chriſtian, in that Day, and even leap for Joy, for exceeding great ſhall thy Reward be in Heaven; for in this manner it was done unto the Prophets;* and in this manner likewise it was done to thy Lord and Maſter, and to his Apoſtles, and to the moſt glorious of his Saints in all Ages.

II. The ſecond Thing I deſire to be conſidered about this Buſineſs, is this; that tho' it be allowed that God may be ſaid to tempt Men, taking Temptation for a mere Trial of Mens Virtue and Sincerity, yet, if we will take the Word in the Senſe that it is commonly uſed in, *viz.* for an active Sollicitation to that which is evil, in this Senſe we ſay it is not in the Nature of God to tempt any of his Creatures. And this

is the proper Meaning of my Text, *Let no Man say, when he is tempted, that he is tempted of God, for God tempteth no Man;* that is to say, God is not the Cause that any Man falls into Sin by Temptation; neither doth he put any Man into such Circumstances, that he must necessarily and unavoidably be a Transgressor of God's Laws in them: Neither, thirdly, doth he, in any Condition of Life, actually solicit or intice a Man from his Duty: Neither, in the fourth Place, let a Man be under what Temptations he will, doth God ever incline or excite his Heart to close with them, or create or stir up any Corruptions in him to take fire from them. In none of these Senses doth God tempt any Man; for *he is of purer Eyes than to behold, or approve, any Iniquity* of any kind, in any Person whatsoever; and therefore certainly he will have no Hand in the producing of it. And that is the Meaning of the Reason which the Apostle gives, *why God tempteth no Man: God, says he, cannot be tempted with Evil, and he tempteth no Man; viz. God, who cannot by any Means be drawn to Iniquity himself, will certainly never draw others to it.* His Nature is infinite Holiness and Purity; and there is nothing in the World so contrary to it, as Vice and Sin. And therefore we cannot imagine that he will any way be the Author or Abettor, or Promoter of that which he most hates; the
Tempter

Tempter to that which of all Things in the World is most displeasing to him; nay, which of all Things in the World he hath only an Aversion to. Nay, further; So far is God from tempting to Sin in any of the Senses I have now mentioned, that he is always ready to assist us in all the Temptations which do assault us, that we be not overcome by them. This is the

III. Third Proposition I lay down in this Matter.

A thousand Temptations doth he really prevent, which would otherwise come upon us, scattering the Snares of our malicious Adversary, and counter-working his Stratagems. And whatever Temptations he doth suffer us to fall into, yet, if we beg his Help and Protection, he will not fail to give us such Strength, as we shall be able to vanquish them.

If the Circumstances of our Lives were left to our own Conduct, the Devil, whose Business it is in the World to seduce Mankind, would soon make a Prey of us; nor would there be any Possibility of avoiding his Nets. But the same God, who hath set Bounds to the Floods of the Sea, hath also set Bounds to the Incursions of our Enemy, saying, *hitherto shalt thou go, and no further.* And even in those Cases where he doth suffer the Tempter to spread his Nets, yet, by that merciful Providence which

watches over Mankind, his Designs are so defeated, that oftentimes he hath not that Success which he desires or expects, even upon those that are not so very good, or so careful of their own Ways, as they should be. Even as to these, the restraining Grace of God is often so powerful, or he so interposes by unforeseen Providences, as to preserve them from such grievous Falls and Mischiefs, as, had they been left to their own Virtue and Counsel, they could not have prevented.

But then, as for those who have the Fear of God before their Eyes, and do sincerely endeavour, in all their Actions, to approve themselves to him, these Persons are under so particular a Care and Protection of God, that whatever Temptations God thinks fit to exercise them with, they shall be supported under them, and endowed with sufficient Strength to overcome them.

Heb. 4. 15. For our Lord Jesus Christ, *who was in all things tempted like unto us* (as the Apostle tells us) *is abundantly both able and willing to succour us when we are tempted.* And

2. 18.

And tho' he do not sometimes upon our Prayers remove the Temptation from us so soon as we may desire, yet that which comforted St. Paul in this Case, ought to satisfy us also, *viz. That his Grace is sufficient for us.* 2 Cor. xii. 9.

IV. My

IV. My fourth and last Proposition is, God doth not only not tempt us to Sin, and assist us likewise against the Temptations of Sin, but, (which deserves to be especially considered in this Argument) he is always, on the contrary, tempting us from Sin, if we may so use that Word, which is commonly taken in a bad Sense. The Devil is not more ready to infuse bad Thoughts into our Hearts, than the Holy Spirit of God is to inspire us with those that are good. The Devil is not more diligent to make use of every Object, every Occasion that presents itself to us, for the solliciting us from our Duty, than the Holy Spirit of God is to take every Opportunity of darting his holy Motions into our Minds, and thereby exciting us and persuading us to Virtue and Obedience. As we are encompassed by a Multitude of evil Angels, that labour to circumvent us; so are there, no Doubt, as many good Angels, that watch over us for our Good. And as those are wonderfully busy and active to throw Rubs and Stumbling-blocks in our Way; so, on the other side, these are every whit as industrious not only to help us to get over those Difficulties and Temptations, but to present us with fair Occasions of making our own Advantage by them. Here are then Temptations on both sides, and Tempters on both sides, to set home those Temptations.

tations. The only Question is, whether of these have the greater Force? But this Question needs no great Labour or Skill to answer it. It is just as if we should ask, Whether God or the Devil be stronger? Whether the Temptation of a light momentary Pleasure, and that mingled with a great deal of Trouble and Vexation, can be more prevalent over a reasonable Creature, than the Hopes of an inconceivably great and eternal Weight of Glory? Or, lastly, whether the Spirit, that *works in the Children of Disobedience*, can over-power that Spirit of Christ, which once triumph'd over all the Powers of Darknes, and made Shew of them openly? But certainly this can bear no Dispute. For every one, that believes God to govern the World, and Christ Jesus to have been sent by him, will readily say with the Apostle, in the 4th of the 1st of St. John, that *greater is he that is in us, than he that is in the World*. That is, the good Spirit of God, and his holy Angels that do attend him, are far more willing and more powerful to do us Good, to tempt us to our Profit, than the Devil and his Angels can be to do us Hurt, and to tempt us to our Mischief. And if any of us do miscarry, the Reason is, not that we have not more strong Temptations to Virtue than to Vice, but because we are unaccountably drawn away by our own Lusts,

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and inticed, as St. James expresses it in the Words after my Text.

The Application I desire to make to these three last Points is two-fold.

In the first Place, let every one learn, from what has been said, never to charge the Sins or Miscarriages of his Life, either directly or indirectly, upon God. Let no body say, when he hath lived a careless or a lewd Life, or is under the Power and Dominion of any vicious Habit, that God was any way the Cause of it; for *God tempteth no Man*.

And here two Sorts of Persons are to be blamed.

First, They who excuse their Sins upon a Pretence that the Condition of their Lives did necessarily engage them in them. Such Temptations were naturally consequent upon the Circumstances that Divine Providence had placed them in, that they must have been more than Men to have resisted them. But this is a very unreasonable Pretence; for it is certain, God never puts thee into such a Condition, but thou mightest, if thou pleased, not only live very innocently in it, but laudably too: So as not only to have done thyself a great deal of Good, but also to have brought Honour to thy Christian Profession. And if thou art in Circumstances wherein thou canst not so behave thyself, it is certain God did not place

place thee in them, but thine own Folly and evil Courses have brought them upon thee.

Secondly, As much to be blamed are they who plead the Want of God's Grace for the Wickedness of their Lives; who think that the spiritual Assistances, which God afforded them, were not sufficient for the reclaiming the Badness of their Natures. But how vain is this Pretence? Canst thou say, that ever in thy Life thou didst an evil Action for which thy Conscience flew in thy Face, but thou mightest have avoided it, if thou hadst pleased, as well as done it? Was ever God wanting to thee? Hast thou not found his Holy Spirit ready at all times to suggest good Thoughts to thy Mind, and to give thee powerful Reasons why thou shouldest not yield to the present Temptation? And if thou wouldest have considered them, thou hadst certainly not done as thou didst. This, if thou wilt consult thine own Conscience, thou canst not deny. And if thou hast now brought thyself to such a Pitch of Impotence or Sottishness, that thou art blindly hurried away by thy Appetites and Passions, and seemest to be under a Necessity of sinning, Who art thou to thank for this, but thyself? God gave thee Grace sufficient; nay, for any thing thou dost or can know to the contrary, as much Grace as he giveth to any Man in thy Circumstances. But thou, by despising it,
and

and constantly abusing it, hast made thyself unworthy of it: And now, perhaps, God hath withdrawn it, *and given thee over* Eph. 4. 19. *to a reprobate Mind to commit Sin with Greediness*; without Check or Reluctancy whilst it is a committing, and without Reflection or Remorse afterwards.

This, it is true, is a dismal Condition; but it is thou that hast brought thyself into it; and that very Consideration, if thou shouldst die in that Condition, will be the greatest Torment to thee hereafter, *viz.* to think that God was not wanting to thee any ways, but thou mightest have been as eternally happy as any Saint in Heaven, but that thou, silly, inconsiderate Fool as thou wert, having a Prize put into thy Hands, hadst not an Heart to make use thereof.

The second Use I would make of the Doctrine I have delivered, is, for the Encouragement of all Christians to go vigorously in the Christian Warfare, how many Temptations soever they may be assaulted with.

And here likewise the fore-going Discourse naturally leads me to recommend two Things to you, in order to that Encouragement. I just name them, and conclude.

First, Do you find it a difficult Matter to live virtuously, and to preserve your Innocence in this World, thro' the Multitude

tude of Temptations and Snares with which you are every where beset? Be not dismay'd at this, neither cease your Endeavour to live as you should do: Only put your Trust in God, and, by constant Application to him, cast yourselves under his Protection. Assure yourselves, that if you seriously mind his Service, and, with all your Souls, endeavour to recommend yourselves to him, he will take Care of you. He will support you. He will so order Matters, as that either such Trials and Temptations, as you most dread, shall not come upon you; or if they do come, he will give you Strength to go thro' with them, and *the Trials of your Faith shall succeed to Praise, and Honour, and Glory, (as St. Peter speaks.)* Never was any Man baffled by the Devil, or any of his Artifices, that did heartily cleave to God, and constantly implore his Protection. It is either our own gross Carelessness in the Ways of God, or our immoderate vicious Concern for our worldly or sensual Interests, that occasions our Fall in the Day of Temptation. Let us entirely devote ourselves to God, and follow the Dictates of our Conscience in the plain Instances of our Duty, and there is no Doubt but he will direct us, and govern us in all the Circumstances and all the Events of our Lives, and bring us safely at last, thro' all the Temptations of this World, to his everlasting Kingdom.

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1 Pet. 1.7.

The second Thing I would recommend to you upon Occasion of this Discourse, is, that you would not take too short and scanty Measures of what a Christian ought to do, or what he may attain to, upon Account of the manifold Temptations that do assault you. You may be apt to think, because your Natures are so very weak and frail, and Temptations so thick and powerful, that it is but exceeding little, that with all your Endeavours you are able to perform in a virtuous and religious Life. If you can but keep out of gross Sins, and make a shift to say your Prayers constantly, and so frame your Lives, that your Conscience doth not accuse you of the great Immoralities of human Life, you think is as great an Attainment as is to be expected. Why I grant even this is very well; and I would to God that all our Professors of Christianity would go thus far. We should then have a much better World than we have. But is there no more expected from Christians? Hath God shewed you your Duty so clearly in his holy Word? Hath he given you such exceeding precious Promises to excite you to the Performance of that Duty? Hath he laid such inexpressible Obligations upon you to be serious and diligent in it? And, lastly, doth he every Day encourage you with such powerful Assistances, tempting you more strongly than the Devil and all his Agents can do:

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Giving his Holy Spirit into your Hearts to guide and direct you, to comfort and refresh you, to strengthen and establish you, and sending forth likewise his holy Angels to be a Guard about you, and to defend you continually from the Snares and Machinations of the Powers of Darknes? And after all this considered, Can you satisfy yourselves with this, that you are not very bad?

For Shame! Christians, if ye will be called by that Name, Rouze up yourselves to better Thoughts. Do not take up with such a low Degree of Virtue, as that which you seem to have set to yourselves; but aspire after greater Matters. Labour to be like your Lord and Master, *who though he was tempted in all things like us*, yet vanquished all Temptations, and ran a glorious Course, which he hath propos'd to all his Disciples to follow him in.

Look upon those that next followed him; the great Apostles, the glorious Martyrs, the whole Succession of Christians for some Ages. They all call upon you *to be Followers of them, as they were of Christ Jesus*. They were eminent in their Generation, and *shone forth as Lights in the World*. They did not think it enough not to live viciously, but thought themselves obliged to give Examples of a great Virtue to others, *abounding in all the Fruits of the Spirit, Love, Joy, Peace, and Long-suffering, Gentleness,*

tleness, Goodness, Faith, Meekness, Temperance, and every other excellent Quality.

And now these are all dead in the Faith of Christ, and have attained the glorious Rewards that our Lord promised. And shall not we who survive, and expect to be crowned at last, as they are, shall not we give some Testimonies that we are their Successors? At least that we are of that Religion that they were of? We have the same Precepts that they had; the same Promises, and the same Assistances. Where then is our Christianity, if do not imitate them? Oh then, let us endeavour to walk in their Steps: Let us at least *lay aside every Weight, and all the Sins that do so easily beset us*, and run with Patience and Cheerfulness, with Zeal and Perseverance, that noble Race that is set before us: Which that we may all do, God of his infinite Mercy grant, &c.

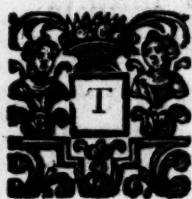




SERMON XV.

ECCLES. ii. 11.

Then I looked on all the Works that my Hands had wrought, and on the Labour that I had laboured to do; and behold, all was Vanity and Vexation of Spirit, and there was no Profit under the Sun.



THESE Words contain one of those Conclusions that *Solomon* draws from the several Experiments which he had made in his Search after Happiness. And if we consider by whom they were spoken, and upon how much Consideration, and after what Trials and Experience, we may depend upon it that they are, tho' a short, yet a very true Description and Representation of the State of human Life. And consequently that there is very little Prospect of any Man's being happy here, that hath

hath no Views beyond the Things of this present World. There is no Man living can ever expect to be in more happy outward Circumstances than *Solomon* was, or to enjoy more of this World's Good than *Solomon* did. And if he, after all, found nothing but Labour and Trouble, and Dissatisfaction and Emptiness, no real Profit, no Advantage in any worldly Thing, what must we, *that come after the King* (as he expresseth it in this Chapter; what must we) expect to find? Certainly no better Fortune than he did.

v. 12.

And if this be the Case of Mankind, how unaccountable is it, that any of us should fix our Thoughts and Designs, our Comforts and Expectancies upon any thing under the Sun. And yet, God knows, thus most of us do; *Though the Bed is shorter* ^{Isaiah} *than that we can stretch ourselves upon it,* ^{28. 20.} *and the Covering narrower than that we can wrap ourselves in it* (as the Prophet speaks) nay, tho' every thing in Nature calls upon us, (in the Words of another Prophet) saying, *Arise, for this is not your Rest*; yet, ^{Micah 2.} ^{10.} vain Men! we will needs set up our Rest here. We are willing to think of nothing farther than this World. We are so wholly immersed in the Businesses and Concernments of this present Life, that we have no Room or Leisure for the Thoughts of that which is to come. If it would please God to let us live always as we do,

we should be well content, we should desire nothing more. We should say to God, as one of the Apostles did once to
 Matt. 17. 4. our Saviour, *Lord, it is good for us to be here.*

But how absurd are these Wishes! How ridiculous is this Carriage! Nothing in the World can apologize for it. It is just the same Folly that those Men are guilty of, that being tossed up and down at Sea, yet nevertheless desire to be still there, and cannot endure to think of coming to a Port. It is the Madness of those, that being condemned to dig in the Mines, are so much in Love with Toil and Labour, with Chains and Darkness, that they despise a Life above Ground, a Life of Light and Liberty. In a Word, it is the fantastick Punishment of *Tantalus* in the Poets, that these Men wish for themselves: They desire to spend their Time for ever in gaping after those lovely pleasant Fruits, which (they fancy) seem almost to touch their Mouths. Yet all their Labour is in vain: And as they never did, so they never shall be able to come at them.

Will you give me Leave, in Pursuance of my Text, to make good this by an Induction of Particulars. From hence you will too plainly see the Truth of *Solomon's* Proposition, and consequently how foolish it is to look for Happiness in any thing of this World.

I. And

1. And first of all, let us consider the continual Toil and Labour that Mankind in this World are exposed to. Such is the State of human Things, that there are very few Hours of our Lives in which we are at Ease, and free from Care and Travail: But mostly we are in a Hurry, and one Labour still succeeds on the Neck of another. The dispatching of one Business is but the making Room for some other, and possibly more troublesome one that is presently to follow after. We toil till we are weary, and have exhausted our Strength and Spirits, and then we think to refresh and recruit ourselves: But, alas! that Refreshment is only to prepare and enable us for the bearing the next Hour's Burthen, which will inevitably come upon us. We are all of us, more or less, Servants and Bondmen, under a constant and fatal Necessity of doing Drudgery. What a World of Pains and Hardships is undergone by a great Part of Mankind merely for getting a Livelihood, a Subsistence for themselves and their Families? Though, God knows, it is oftentimes a very mean one; they, with all their Toil and Labour, having much ado to keep themselves from a Prison or an Hospital. As for others, that are put by Providence into better outward Circumstances, they are never a Jot the more free from Anxiety and Cares. For tho' they are provided of necessary Supports, yet

the Desire of maintaining their Credit in the World, and living up to the Height of their Quality and Fortune, or the Ambition of advancing their Families, and leaving their Children in more splendid Circumstances, than they find themselves; I say, one of these Things puts them upon the Necessity of continually harrassing their Minds with worldly Sollicitude and Drudging, as if they had nothing to depend upon. Those that are not troubled with the Pangs of Covetousness, but are well content with that Portion that God hath given them, yet find Difficulty and Vexation enough in the very Discharge of their Callings and Employments. Or suppose they have no Calling to follow, but seem to be loose from the World, yet it is scarce possible for them to live without driving on some Designs, either of Pleasure or Ambition, or twenty other Things, according as their Temper inclines them. And the carrying on these Designs, doth put their Heads as much upon the Rack, and oblige them to as laborious and active a Diligence, as if they were some of the busy Men of the World: Nay, that Course of Life, which, of all others, seems the quietest and the least cumbersome, *viz.* the abstracting ourselves from the World, and applying our Minds to Contemplation and the Knowledge of Things, yet doth even that (such is our Frame in this World)

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engage Men in as much Labour as any of the rest. *He that increaseth Knowledge,* Eccl. 1. 18.
increaseth Trouble. And much Study is a Chap. 12. 12.
Weariness of the Flesh, as Solomon tells us.

In a Word, this whole Life is nothing else but a Circle of Cares, and Designs, and Business, and Vexations. *Man is born to Labour* Job 5. 7.
and Trouble, as the Sparks fly upwards; and therefore to term this sublunary World a Place of Ease and Repose, is the improperest Name we can call it by.

2. But, secondly, this is not all: We might, possibly, find some Comfort in that Pains and Labour we take in this World, at least, they would be much more supportable, if we were sure our Designs would always succeed; if we were sure to attain that which we labour for: but, alas! it is oftentimes quite otherwise. We meet with frequent Disappointments in our Endeavours: Nay, we cannot say before-hand, of any thing we undertake, that it shall certainly come to pass as we would have it. And this is a Matter that renders the World a Place of still more Restlessness and Disquiet. Would it not vex a Man, when he hath set his Heart upon a Thing, and hath laid his Plots for the bringing it about as well as the Wit of Man can devise, and hath pursued the Business with great Industry and Diligence, hath made his Friends, hath removed, as he thinks, all the Rubs that lay between him and his Designs, and

hath brought Matters to that Pass, that he seems just upon the Point of obtaining his Wishes; and yet in a Moment, by some unforeseen Cause, or unthought-of Accident, which it was not in the Power of Man to prevent, to be defeated of his Expectations, to have his Hopes blasted, and to be but just where he was before? And yet this is nothing but what every Day happens in the Course of the World, and is impossible to be avoided. Nay, in truth, considering upon what a Multitude of Things the Success of our Designs or Endeavours doth depend, (none of which are yet in our Power) we have reason to wonder that our Labours do succeed so often as they do, rather than that they miscarry so frequently.

If now it be a State of Happiness to be always busy and designing, and yet always to be uncertain whether our Designs shall take Effect; to be passionate, and earnest, and impatient in our Desires of many Things, and yet for once obtaining what we desire, to be twice disappointed; to tire ourselves with bustling to obtain our Ends, and yet often to reap nothing but the Wind for all our Pains; I say, if this be Happiness, if this be the Life we can sit down content with, then we may call this World a happy Place. Otherwise not.

3. But,

3. But, thirdly, this is not all yet. Supposing, after several Disappointments, and with much Difficulty, we do attain our Ends, and get what our Souls desired, yet doth the Thing answer our Expectation? Do we find that it is fit, and good, and convenient for us? If so, then we seem to have laboured to some Purpose. But if not, then we are but still where we were; nay, we had better never have troubled our Heads about it. But now that it frequently happens in the World that Men long passionately, and take a great deal of Pains for those Things which, when they are once possessed of, they find quite different from what they hoped for, and very much unfitting their Circumstances, is too much attested by the Experience of Mankind to be denied. We are fanciful in our Desires and Appetites, and many times direct our Choice and Designs, not so much by our own Needs and Necessities, as the Opinions of other Men. We think every thing that is fine or brave, that is esteemed or set by in the World, will presently become us. But then, after we have with much Toil got what we wished for, then we find ourselves mistaken in our Counsels, we see we had better have been without those Things: We see that instead of contributing to our Happiness, they expose us to a great many more Troubles and Mischiefs, than the Condition we were in before.

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The Truth is, we do not know beforehand what is good for us in this World, and yet we will not leave the ordering our Condition to God, who only doth know. But we will needs be projecting for ourselves, and we do, with Might and Main, carry on those Projects: And God is sometimes pleased to permit them to take Effect. And the Event is, that by our own Choice, and at the Expence of abundance of Pains, we make ourselves unhappy. The Generality of Men, not content with that Portion of outward Goods which is allotted them, will needs be rich, in spite of their Destiny; and some of them succeed in their Wishes: but not having Tempers and Spirits contrived for great Fortunes, this Wealth of theirs doth ingage them in many great Follies and Vices, (that without it possibly they had never been guilty of) which, in the End, do often prove their Undoing. Those that have no Children, how desirous are they of them? and yet who knows, but if God grant their Desires, those Children might prove the greatest Torments to them that ever befel them? Few love to live in Obscurity, but would be some-body, would be in a conspicuous Station in the World: Yet it may be, when they have attained to great Places, they are not qualified for them, they are not fit to manage them; and their Heads being too weak to look down from such a Precipice,

pice, they either grow dizzy and stand trembling, or tumble down with a much greater Ruin. And as it is in these Instances, so it is proportionably with most of the other Designs we pursue in this World, whether they be little or great.

So that, in truth, the Lot of Mankind, in this Life, is very hard. In all our Labours, we either hit, or miss; we either succeed, or are disappointed. If we be disappointed, we are certainly troubled: And if we do succeed, for any thing we know, that very Success may prove our greatest Unhappiness.

4. But, fourthly, to go a little further yet; Let us suppose that we have brought no Inconvenience upon ourselves by our Choice. Let us suppose our Designs were reasonable, and they rightly succeeded, and the Circumstances of our Condition are every way fit and proper for us: Yet, is this sufficient to procure us Content? May we then say to ourselves, *Soul, take thine Ease, eat, drink, and be merry?* Alas! there is too much Reason to fear the contrary; for such is the Constitution of this World, that let us be in what Circumstances we will, yet we shall meet with many Troubles and Inconveniencies that do necessarily flow from the Nature of that Condition which we are in, tho' otherwise it may be the fittest for us of all others. There is no State of Life, even the most desirable, but
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is attended with many peculiar Disadvantages of its own. Others possibly, that are at a Distance, may not see this. They may think us very happy. They may admire our good Fortune, that were born under such lucky Planets. They believe we live free from all manner of Inquietude and Discontent. But we know other Things. We feel where our Shoe pincheth us. We are sensible, that if others saw into our State, as much as we do ourselves, they would not be so apt to envy us. Nay, so far are even the happiest among us, from pleasing ourselves in our Ways of Living, that we often think we see others that are happier than we, and with whom, as to many Things, we would willingly change Conditions. Are we engaged in a Life of Action and Business? How do we applaud the Happiness of those that live in Ease and Privacy, and can command their own Time. Do we, on the contrary, live in Retirement, and have but few Affairs to mind? When then our Time lies upon our Hands, and we complain for want of Employment, and call only those happy that are Men of Business. Are we in great and splendid Circumstances, above the Rank of common Men? Then we feel the Cares and Burthens that this brings upon us, and only cry up the secure quiet State of those that live in a lower Sphere. But are we, on the contrary, in a low Condition? Who then

then with us, but the great Men, that carry the World before them? Thus are we generally unsatisfied with the present Condition in which we are, and apt to like any other better than our own.

Now this Kind of Discontent doth not always arise from the Inconstancy of our Minds, but from the particular Grievances and Inconveniencies that our State of Life is attended with; which we, being in that State, are extremely sensible of: But we consider not that there are the same, or as great, in other Conditions. Briefly, our Way in this World is all strewed with Briers and Thorns; we can tread no where but our Feet are pricked. There is no sincere unmingled Good to be met with. Every State of Life, as it hath something of Good in it, so the best hath some evil displeasing Appendages inseparably adhering to it. Nay, perhaps, in true speaking, the worldly Happiness of any Man's Condition is not to be measured by the Multitude of Goods he enjoyeth in it, but rather by the Fewness of the Evils it brings upon him.

5. But, fifthly, to go further yet; Let us suppose we find no Inconvenience in the Circumstances of our Lives: We will suppose we are possessed of many Goods, from the Enjoyment of which we may promise to ourselves solid Contentment and Satisfaction. These are our present Thoughts. But are we sure we shall always continue in the

the same Mind? Are we sure that that which is now very grateful and agreeable, and affects us with a sensible Pleasure and Delight, will continue always to do so? On the contrary, have we not much Reason to fear, that, in a little Time, it will grow dull and uninteresting; nay, possibly, very irksome and displeasing? Such is the Nature of Mankind, or the Nature of Things themselves, that no earthly Delight or Comfort can please us long. We are, indeed, very fond of them at the first, and are much tickled and transported with them: But after we have a while enjoyed them, we are cloyed; our Appetites to them are gone, and we throw them behind us, as Children do those Play-Toys that at first they were wonderfully fond of. The greatest Blessings of this World are to the Mind of Man, as any one Sort of Fare, tho' never so delicious, is to a weak Stomach; by long Usage they become flat and unsavoury, and have quite another Relish than they had at first, when they were Novelties to us.

6. But I have not yet done with this Point. To all these Things let us add, in the sixth Place, the numberless daily Troubles and Discomposures of Mind, not peculiar to any Condition, as those I spoke of before, but common to all, arising from Mens Minds and Tempers, and the Things and Persons they converse with in the World.

World. It is a melancholy Consideration; but I believe the Experience of Mankind will make it good, that there is scarce a Day in our Lives, that we pass in perfect uninterrupted Peace and Content, but something or other every Day happens that gives us 'Trouble, and makes us uneasy to ourselves. Nor do I speak this only of the extremely vicious, or the extremely unfortunate, the greatest Part of whose Lives is certainly very irksome and troublesome to them, but of those Persons that are the happiest, those that have the least Reason to complain either of their outward or inward Condition.

Let any Man pick out any Day of his Life, and seriously observe the particular Passages of it, and the State of his own Mind under those Passages, and, I am confident, he will find, that tho' the Evil of that Day doth not counter-balance the Good, yet it is sufficient to interrupt his Happiness, and to render him very unsatisfied, as to several Things. Either he finds himself dull, or out of Humour; or he is persecuted by some very unagreeable Company; or he saith or doth something that he afterwards severely reflects on; or he is displeased with some Language or Carriage of others towards him; or he is put out of his Temper by some ill News, or the Miscarriage of some of his Affairs; or he finds some troublesome Passion to
arise

arise in him that disturbs the Peace of his Spirit; he is rack'd with Fears or with Hopes; or discomposed with Anger and Peevishness; or he is haunted with the Memory of some past Folly or Sin; or he is dispirited with too much Labour; or dull for want of Employment; or vexed with some troublesome Business; or cloyed with his Recreations and Divertisements; or something or other he doth or suffereth that is not very grateful to him. The Discontents which arise from such Causes as these, are indeed infinite and innumerable; and tho' singly taken, they are very small Matters, yet being taken in the Lump, and likewise coming so thick upon us every Day, they really make human Life, in the general, and as to most of the Periods of it, to be a troublesome, unquiet, unsatisfactory Thing.

7. But, seventhly, if these little Things I have mentioned be considerable enough to trouble our Days, what must we say of the many sad Accidents, and more grievous and weighty Afflictions, that do frequently exercise the Patience of Mankind? If in the best Condition of human Life, Men are not happy, but every thing is able to ruffle and disorder them; O how miserable are they in the worst! It is true, all Men do not suffer equally, but some much more than others; but yet he that is afflicted least in this World, hath his sufficient Share
of

of Pain and Anguish, and feels enough to try his Courage and his Patience to the uttermost; especially if to the Consideration of his own Sufferings he adds the bitter Things that he sees others undergo, some of which may likewise come to his own Share before he goes out of the World.

It is able, in truth, to draw Tears from ones Eyes, seriously to reflect upon the sad, deplorable, calamitous Condition of a great Part of Mankind in this World; to exhibit to our Minds that dismal Scene of Things that are every Day presented to our Eyes. Here are some languishing under a long and tedious Distemper, unfit for all the Functions, and incapable of any of the Enjoyments of Life. Others roaring out for the Extremity of Torture they suffer from the Stone, or the Gout, or an Ulcer, or a broken Limb, or some such other tormenting Accident. Others mourning for the Loss of a dear Parent, on whom they depended; or the Death of a Child, who was the Stay and Comfort of their Age. Others fretting and fuming for the disgraceful Circumstances they are fallen into from an high Fortune. Others even heart-broken, for the Poverty and Necessity to which they are reduced thro' the Profuseness of their Lives, or the Misadventures of Trade, or the Ruins of a Fire, or the Calamities of a War. Others groaning and howling under the Whips and Stings of an

awaken'd Conscience, being filled with Horror and Amazement, and Despair, from the Sense of their Crimes, and the Apprehensions of the Vengeance of God in the other World. Others (which is indeed the saddest Sight of all) wallowing in all manner of Sensuality and Wickedness, giving up the Reins to their brutish Appetites, committing all Sorts of Villanies, Murders, Rapines, and Beastialities, without Sense of God or Religion; regardless of their own Souls, or the Souls of others; dishonouring their Profession, blaspheming his Name that made them, and, in a Word, making all the Haste they can to everlasting Damnation.

These Things are very sad, and must deeply affect us, tho' we ourselves were not concerned in them. But, alas! we are none of us mere Spectators of the Miseries of others; we must expect to bear a great Part ourselves in this Tragedy. So long as we have mortal Bodies exposed to Sickness and Diseases, to sad Accidents and Casualties; so long as we have a frail Nature, that betrays us to a thousand Follies and Sins; so long as we have dear Friends and Relations, or Children, that we may be deprived of; so long as we may prove unfortunate in our Marriage, or in our Posterity, or in the Condition of Life we have chosen; so long as there are Men to slander us, or to rob us, or to undermine us;

so

so long as there are Storms at Sea, or Fire upon Land; so long as there are Enemies abroad, or Tumults, Seditions, and Turns of State at home: I say, so long as we are exposed to these Things, we must, every one of us, expect, in some Degree or other, to bear a Share in the Miseries of the World.

And now, all these Things considered, judge ye whether this World doth look like a Place of Rest; whether it is not rather a Stage of Calamities and sad Events. Judge ye, whether the best of human Things be not (as *Solomon* here tells us) *Vanity*; but the worst of them, intolerable *Vexation of Spirit*.

8. Which will still appear the more evident, if, in the eighth and last Place, we add this, namely, That tho' all we have hitherto said did go for nothing; tho' we could be supposed to be exempted from all those Inconveniencies and Mischiefs I have mentioned; tho' we could be supposed to be capable of an uninterrupted Enjoyment of the good Things of this Life as long as we live; (which yet, you see, in the Constitution of Things, is impossible) yet even this would not satisfy much to the making our State in this World easy and happy; for there is one Thing still would spoil all such Hopes and Pretences, and that is, the *Fear of Death*, which, as *St. Paul* truly observes, hath made Mankind *all their Life*—*Heb. 2. 15.*

time subject to Bondage. For a Man to consider, that how happy and prosperous soever his Circumstances are, yet he is mortal as well as other Folks; he must, in a little Time, die, as he sees his Neighbours do, and leave all his Comforts behind him; O what a dismal Reflection must this needs be to a Man who hath set up his Rest in this World, and dreams of no other Happiness but what he hath here! To think, that in a few Years at the farthest, but possibly in a few Months or Days, (for no Man knows how soon the Time will come that God will call him) he shall *lie down in the Dust*, and then all that he hath here possessed and enjoyed, is lost and gone, irrecoverably gone! Only there is his Carriage and Behaviour in this World, his Virtues and his Vices, his Thoughts, and Words, and Actions that will go with him into the other World, and these must be severely scanned and accounted for! I say, for a Man, that hath no other Aims in this World, to consider these Things, how ungrateful, how tormenting must the Thought of them be! What Rest, what Peace can accrue to him from all the Satisfaction of this Life! This Business of Dying, and what is to come after it, is such a bitter Sauce, such a Mixture of Gall and Wormwood to all a sensual Man's Enjoyments, that it is impossible to avoid the being miserable under the Apprehensions of it.

O that

O that we would seriously think upon these Things ! We should certainly have this Advantage by it, that we should not any longer be cheated with the gaudy Appearances of this World, but look after something more solid, more substantial, than any thing we find here, to live for, to set our Hearts and Affections upon. We should tremble to think of having *received our good Things in this Life*, and look upon ourselves as most wretched forlorn Creatures, if we had no farther Hopes and Expectancies. And this is the Use for which I intended all this Discourse, which I beg Leave a little to insist upon, and then I conclude.

I have given you (you see) a Picture, as well as I could draw it, of the State of this present World, and the Condition of that Man, who looks no farther than it. And this, in order (as I told you at the Beginning) to the shewing the Folly and Madness of placing our Happiness in any thing here to the Neglect of Heaven and Eternity. But I am sensible this Account I have given will be apt to give Offence to some. They will say, that all this Declamation against the World, is little better than a Libel against the Divine Providence. For what doth the representing human Life, as so imperfect, so dull, so miserable an Estate ; what doth this mean, but to call the Goodness and Wisdom of God into

Question, since he might as easily have contrived it better?

I answer, No such Matter. There will appear no Colour for this Objection, if we would consider that God seems on purpose to have framed this earthly State so short, and imperfect, and obnoxious to Evils, as we find it, that we might not set our Hearts upon it; that we might not think of fixing here, but should esteem ourselves *Strangers and Pilgrims*, and look up to him for an *abiding and continuing City in another Country*. If God had intended that this World should have been our Dwelling-place for ever, he would certainly have so contrived the Frame of it, and so have ordered all its Affairs, and he would likewise have so suited our Natures and Faculties thereunto, that every good Man, at least, should never have failed of enjoying all the Satisfaction and Happiness here that he was capable of. But since God designed Men for another and a more glorious Place than this World, and sent them hither only as Probationers, or by way of Trial, how they would use those Talents that he gave them, and in order to the fitting them for that glorious and eternal Inheritance above; it was the greatest Kindness God could do us, not to make this World too tempting a Place, but to exercise all that come into it with such Labours, and Difficulties, and Uneasinesses, that

that none, that hath his Wits about him, may be fond of it, but groan after those eternal Mansions that God hath provided for all good Men in Heaven. We come hither as into a School, or Place of Exercise, that, by the severe Discipline that is here used, we might be trained up and fitted for a glorious and immortal State. So that it is for great good Ends to us that we are no happier in this World, and consequently it is no Disparagement to the Goodness of God.

Others will be apt to quarrel with the Description I have given of the State of this World, upon Account that it is so melancholy and uncomfortable. This Account of Things (say they) takes away from us all Possibility of any tolerable Content or Happiness in this Life.

But to them I answer, No, by no means, but only from those Persons that expect no other State but this, and therefore live in the World as if they were to live there always. Such Men as these, I have sufficiently shew'd, will always be miserable in the best Circumstances of Life, and therefore much more in the worse ones. But there is a Way of being very happy, very contented, nay, of perpetually rejoicing in this World. And that is, to sit as loose as we can from it: Not to enslave ourselves to it; but to govern our Affec-

tions, and Appetites, and Passions, by the Rule of Reason and the Word of God: To remember that we were made for the Enjoyment of God, and therefore to love him above all Things, to place our Hope, our Confidence, our Trust, our Dependance, our Joy and Comfort in him, and him only: To make it the Business of our Lives to approve ourselves to him, by keeping a clear and unspotted Conscience, by practising Righteousness, and Sobriety, and Godliness in all our Conversation: And lastly, to cast up our Eyes continually to those glorious Rewards that our Saviour hath provided for us in the Regions above; so that Heaven may have our Hearts, our Affections, while this World hath our Bodies. If we frame our Minds and Lives according to these Measures, we shall never be miserable, let the World be as calamitous as it will. We shall be out of the Reach of the common Accidents and Disasters of human Life; that is to say, tho' they come upon us, yet they shall not harm or dismay us. We shall have something to support us, and to bear up our Spirits against every Ruffle, every Disappointment, every Thing that can come cross to us. And, to conclude, as we shall enjoy abundance of Peace and Comfort in this World, tho' mixed with some Uneasiness, so, when we come to die, we shall be the most

most glorious happy Creatures that Words
can express, or the Mind of Man conceive;
for then we shall enter into that eternal
Rest, *which God hath prepared for them
that love him.* Which that we may all do,
God of his infinite Mercy grant, &c.



SER-



SERMON XVI.

2 P E T. i. 10.

Wherefore the rather, Brethren, give Diligence, to make your Calling and Election sure.



IN treating on this Text, I shall speak to these four Points.

I. What is meant by making our Calling and Election sure.

II. How, or by what Means, they are to be made sure.

III. What it is to give all Diligence to make them sure.

IV. The great Obligations that lie upon all of us to give all Diligence.

I. I begin with the first Point, What it is to make our Calling and Election sure.

And here we must first enquire what is meant by our Calling and Election: And then what it is to make them sure.

1. As for this Word Calling, it is generally used in the New Testament, to express that especial Grace and Mercy of God, by which Men are brought to the Belief and Profession of Christ's Religion. That this is the Scripture Notion of Calling, would be easy to shew, by a particular Enumeration of those Texts where this Word is used; but I shall only now mention two or three principal ones, which give Light to this Matter.

Ye see, Brethren, (says St. Paul) your 1 Cor. 1.
Calling, how that not many wise Men after 26.
the Flesh, not many Mighty, not many Noble,
are called. Where the being called is nothing else but the becoming Christians. And the Sense of the Place is this, That however the rich, the great and worldly-wise Men might have the Gospel preached to them, and were invited to the Christian Profession, yet few of them did receive that Invitation, or were effectually called, it being chiefly the poorer and humbler sort of Men that gave in their Names to Christ.

Thus again: *I beseech you, that ye walk* Eph. 4. 1.
worthy of the Vocation (Calling) where-
with

with ye are called. That is, in plain English, let your Lives and Conversations be suitable to that Christian Profession that God hath honoured you with.

Thus again, St. Paul affirms of all Christians, of all that are within the Pale of the Church, that they are called with an ^{2 Tim. 1. 9.} *holy Calling*, and that they are *Partakers of the heavenly Calling*: And lastly, in his Language the *Called* are those that are opposed to the Infidels, whether they were *Jews or Greeks*, 1 Cor. i. 24.

We see by these Passages, what is the Notion of our *Calling*; for as for the other Term in my Text, that of *Election*, whatever that Word may signify in other Places, yet here it seems to mean the same Thing, in effect, with *Calling*. If there be any Difference between them, it is this, that our *Calling* respects our being actually brought over to the Belief of Christ's Religion. Our *Election* respects God's Purposes and Designs in conferring those Privileges upon us long before we were in being. The latter Word expresses God's eternal Design of Grace and Mercy to us, in putting us into a Condition of Salvation by Jesus Christ. The former Word expresses his actual Execution of those Designs, by actually bringing us in the Course of his Providence to the Knowledge and Belief of Christ Jesus.

This

This Difference, I say, we may make between these Words, if we will criticise upon them: But still, as I said, in effect, they come to the same Thing. For who-soever is *called of God*, is also *elect of God*, in this Sense of the Word *Elect*; and hence it is, that all Christians, in Opposition to Pagans and Infidels, are called *an elect Generation*; just as all the *Israelites*, in Opposition to the Nations about them, are frequently in the Old Testament called *an elect People*. 1 Pet. 1. 9.

It is true, there is in Scripture another Notion of *the Elect*, than what I have now given, *viz.* where they are taken for those that not only enjoy the outward Privileges of the Gospel, but really walk worthy of them, and so are actually approved of God. Now to be *elect* in this Sense, is something more than *to be called*; and in this Sense it is that our Saviour is to be understood, when he tells us more than once, that *many are the Called, but few are the Elect or Chosen*. Matt. 20. 16. 22. 14. Which we are not to understand thus, Many are those that are called to be Christians, but few are those that are decreed to be saved; (for tho' this Sense may be orthodox, yet it doth not at all agree with the Scope of our Saviour's Words) but we are to understand his Speech thus, Many there are that come in at the Call of the Gospel, and list themselves among the Number of the Christian Professors; but few

few are those that live up to that Profession, and so are accepted and approved of God as worthy Christians.

But the being *elect* in this Sense, is not the *Election* that my Text here speaks of. For this *Election* is already made sure and firm, by the sincere Obedience of the Persons so elected: But the *Election* spoken of in my Text, is supposed not yet to be so; but we are exhorted *to make it so*. It would be a vain Thing for the Apostle to bid us *give all Diligence to make our Election sure*, if it was already *sure* without our Diligence.

H. And thus much of the Notion and Importance of those Terms *Calling* and *Election*. And from what has been said concerning them, it will be easy to gather, in the second Place, what it is *to make them sure*. For since by our Calling and Election is meant the free Grace and Favour of God in bringing us to the Knowledge and Profession of his Gospel, and owning us for his own People, and as such, designing us to Glory and Happiness; the *making* of these *sure* or *firm*, must be the taking Care that we do not *receive this Grace of God in vain*; but that it may really prove effectual to us, that is to say, that we may actually obtain the Benefits that were intended us thereby, *viz.* the everlasting Salvation of our Souls.

I know

I know there are some that would give another Account of *making our Calling and Election sure*. They suppose that they are already sure in the Event; so that no Man, who is called and elected, can finally lose the Benefits of them. But the Apostle would have us further to make them sure to ourselves; that is, *to use all Diligence to get ourselves assured that we are in the Number of those that are called and elected to Salvation*; and that this is all that he meant by this Exhortation. But, I think, this Gloss is without any Foundation; nay, is rather expressly contrary to the Design of the Apostle in this Place. For it is plain, that he here speaks of such a *Calling and Election*, as that one, who is so called and elected, may yet fall away, and finally miscarry: Else why doth he add in the next Words, *If ye do these Things, ye shall never fall*; which plainly implies, that if they did not do them, they might fall. Besides, the very Words he here useth, will hardly bear such a Construction as those Persons would put upon it; for *βεβαιωσεν* doth not signify *to get ourselves assured of a Thing*, as they would have it, but to make a Thing firm and sure; which is quite a different Matter.

To this Purpose therefore we may suppose St. Peter spoke to the Christians in my Text. Great, O Christians, are the Favours that God hath vouchsafed to you.
He

He hath called you from the Darknels of Idolatry and Superstition, to the Light of his glorious Gospel. Ye, who were once not a People, are now the peculiar Treasure of the Lord. Ye, who were once the Children of Wrath, are now, through Faith in Christ Jesus, begotten again to the Hope of an eternal Inheritance among the Sons of God. God hath chosen you out of the World to be his Favourites here on the Earth, and to crown you eternally in Heaven. All these great Things he hath done, and designed for you. But then you must remember, that there is something to be done on your Part, in order to the effectually reaping the Benefits of these Privileges. These Promises of God are made to you upon certain Conditions; which Conditions, if you do not perform, you may fail of obtaining them. Far therefore be it from you to live at random, without taking any further Thought, presuming on the Favour of God, because you have the Honour of being Retainers to his Son. Far be it from you to be careless and unconcerned, as if indeed you were already secure of eternal Happiness, because you have God's *Calling and Election* thereto. On the contrary, it will concern you to use your utmost Care and Diligence to qualify yourselves for the receiving the Fruits and Benefits of these Mercies and Favours of Christ Jesus, and by this means to render them

them *firm and sure*; that is to say, effectual to the Good of your Souls: Which, indeed, otherwise will be so far from being Advantages to you, that they will prove Aggravations of your Guilt and of your Misery. For *how shall you escape, if you neglect so great Salvation*, as is brought to you by the Lord? *Fear therefore, lest a Promise being left you of entering into his Rest, any of you fall short thereof.* Give all imaginable Diligence to make sure to yourselves those gracious Designs of Mercy that God had towards you, when he brought you to the Knowledge of Jesus Christ. And thus much of the first Point, What it is to *make our Calling and Election sure.*

II. The next Thing is to inquire how, or by what Means this is to be done. Now as to that, the Text itself will afford us a sufficient Answer, if we will follow the reading of the vulgar *Latin* Translation, and many likewise of the ancient *Greek* Copies: For they read it thus; Wherefore the rather, my Brethren, give all Diligence *by your good Works* to make your Calling and Election sure. Which Reading doth indeed extremely well suit with what follows, *for if ye do these Things, ye shall never fall.* So that, according to this Account, it is good Works, or a Course of virtuous Actions, that must secure to us our Calling and Election. And this is a

true and certain Account of the Matter, whether the Text be to be read thus or no; for it may plainly be concluded from the Apostle's Discourse, both before and after the Text, *If ye do these Things* (says he) *ye shall never fall.* These Things! What Things? Why certainly either good Works, as I said before, are here referred to; or, if that Clause be not in the Text, then those Things that the Apostle had just been speaking of in the Verses before the Text, must be here understood. Now what these were, you may see in the 5th Verse; and besides this, says he, giving all Diligence, add to your Faith Virtue, and to Virtue Knowledge, and to Knowledge Temperance, and to Temperance Patience, and to Patience Godliness; and to Godliness Brotherly-kindness, and to Brotherly-kindness Charity. For if these Things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the Knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these Things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old Sins. And then follow the Words of my Text, *Wherefore the rather, Brethren, give Diligence, to make your Calling and Election sure*; for if ye do these Things, ye shall never fall; but an Entrance shall be administered unto you abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord Jesus. So that it is plain, from the Apostle's Discourse,

v. 6.

v. 7.

v. 8.

v. 9.

v. 10.

v. 11.

course, that the Things, by which we must make our Calling and Election sure, are no other than the Things which he had been before recommending, *viz.* the adding to our Faith *Virtue, Temperance, Patience, Godliness, Brotherly-kindness, Charity*; in a Word, all the Fruits of a holy Conversation. These are the Things which if we do, we shall never fall: These are the Things, upon our Performance of which, an Entrance shall be administered unto us abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord Jesus. Faith alone will not do; but Faith joined with universal Obedience will; that is to say, a sincere and constant Endeavour in all our Thoughts, and Words, and Deeds, to deny Ungodliness and worldly Lusts: and to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present World; this is that by which we must make our Calling and Election sure. And thus much of the second Point.

III. The third Thing is to inquire what is meant by *giving all Diligence* to make our Calling and Election sure. Now this Phrase doth certainly import thus much, *viz.* that we must shake off all Sloth and Idleness, and with great Industry, and Fervor, and Activity, set ourselves upon the Work.

We must not think that the eternal Welfare of our Souls can be secured by a few

good Thoughts or Purposes, or now and then an Act of Repentance, or a Fit of Devotion, or some faint languid Endeavours to be good. Alas! who ever succeeded in any worldly Design without more Diligence? Who ever got an Estate, or attained to any compleat Degree of Learning or Knowledge, but was more eager and industrious in the Pursuit of it than this amounts to? And can we think that Heaven and eternal Happiness can be purchased at a less Price than a small perishing Good? Can we imagine that God will be so lavish of the greatest Blessings he can bestow, that he will let them be earn'd with a less Degree of Application than will suffice to compass those Blessings that he sets the least Value upon, and which he vouchsafes often, in the Course of his Providence, to the worst of Mankind?

No; if ever we mean to secure that inestimable Treasure to ourselves, we must lay out our whole selves upon it; it must have the first Place in our Esteem and in our Affections: It must be the daily Object of our Thoughts, and Desires, and Meditations; we must hunger and thirst after it; we must study, and contrive, and take Pains, all the Ways we can, to get ourselves possessed of it. We must make it the great Business and Design of our Lives, and not only a Work by the by, a Work to be dispatched at leisure Hours, when we

we have nothing else to do; in a Word; we *must sell all we have to purchase it.* This, I am sure, is that which our Saviour tells us, *Matt. xiii. 4, 5. The Kingdom of Heaven, saith he, is like unto a Merchant-man seeking goodly Pearls, who, when he had found one of great Price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it.* And again he tells us, *That the Kingdom of Heaven suffereth Violence, and the Violent take it by Force.* Matt. 11:12 It is such a Kingdom as cannot be enter'd, but by Assault and Storm; that is to say, it will require the utmost of our Resolution, and Vigour, and Vigilance, and Constancy, for the attaining of it.

There is another Thing that seems to be implied in this Phrase of *giving all Diligence* to make our Calling and Election sure; and that is, a Concernment and Sollicitude about it, in Opposition to Presumption and vain Confidence. He that useth that Diligence about his Salvation, that so weighty a Matter calls for, will not, upon slight Grounds and little Appearances, think himself to have secured it, and so give over all further Concern about it. On the contrary, he will be possessed with great Apprehensions and Anxiety, lest he should miscarry: He will be jealous over himself, lest he should not do his Part towards the attaining of it; he will think all his Care and Thoughtfulness little enough to insure to himself so invaluable a Blessing.

This is that Temper of Mind which the Apostles do so often recommend to us, Phil. 2. 12. *when they bid us work out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling*: When they bid Rom. 11. *us not be high-minded, but fear*: When Heb. 12. ^{20.} *they bid us serve God with Reverence and godly Fear*: When they bid us pass the 1Pct. 1. 17. ^{28.} *Time of our sojourning here in Fear*: Lastly, Heb. 4. 1. *when they bid us fear, lest a Promise being left us of entering into Rest, any of us should fall short of it*. But, Oh! how contrary to this is the Method that some among us have taken up, who, instead of this religious *Fear and Trembling*, with which the Apostles exhort us to *work out our Salvation*, make it their Business to free themselves from all Concern in this Matter. They will not allow themselves so much as to doubt of their Salvation; or if at any time they do, they blame themselves for it, and look upon it as a Sin, as an Instance of their Unbelief and Want of Faith; for they place their very Title to Heaven, in believing that they have a Title to it. If they can but be persuaded strongly enough, that Christ's dying for them in particular, and that he fulfilled the Law in their stead, and can but apply with Confidence all his Merits to themselves, and rest upon him alone for Salvation, without any Works of their own, they think they have done all that is required under the new Covenant; and whoever talks of more, doth

doth not understand the Doctrine of Free Grace, as it is there held forth. But then St. Paul was ignorant of the Free Grace of the Gospel. Did not he understand the Terms upon which we are to be saved? Yet see with what Anxiety and Sollicitude he expresseth himself, even as to his own Particular in this Matter of his Salvation:

If by any means, says he, I may attain to Phil. 3. 12.

the Resurrection of the Dead, (that is, of the Just) not as tho' I had already attained,

v. 12.

or were already perfect: But I follow after, that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren,

v. 13.

I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one Thing I do, forgetting those Things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those Things which are before, I press forward towards the Mark for the Prize of the

v. 14.

High-calling of God in Christ Jesus. Thus doth the holy Apostle declare his great Concern and solicitous Care that he used for the saving his own Soul, when yet undoubtedly he had already as much Assurance of it, as any of us can now a-days pretend to: And if so much Care was still necessary for him, will it not, at least, be as necessary for us? Shall we presume to think of our gaining the Prize upon easier Terms than he durst trust to? And thus much let it suffice to have spoken of our third general Head in my proposed Method.

IV. I come to the fourth and last, and that is, to stir you up to the Practice of the Apostle's Exhortation in my Text, *viz.* that you would give *all Diligence to make your Calling and Election sure.*

Let me therefore, in the Name of the Lord Jesus, call upon all of you, that have been hitherto negligent and careless in this Matter, that you would now at least seriously set about it. As you love your Souls, leave not this Affair any longer at random: Do not sit down satisfied with the vain and uncertain Hopes that you may do well enough hereafter, that you live in as good a Condition as your Neighbours, but with your whole Might and Strength apply yourselves to the working out that Salvation, which God hath called and elected you to.

And in order hereunto, let me desire you seriously to think of what vast Importance and Concernment this Business is to you. It is no trifling Matter. It is not a Thing that may be done, or left undone; but the Happiness or Misery of your whole Life, and that to all Eternity, depends upon it. The securing our future Salvation is a Concern truly infinite. All the other Affairs we have to take Care of in the World are but Trifles to it. And ought not our Care then and Diligence in this Matter to bear some Proportion with the Greatness of the Concern we have in it? Is

it not a wretched foolish Part in us to be busy about small Matters, to be earnest and unwearied in the Pursuit of little Designs, such as a little Wealth, or Pleasure, or the like, which, after a few Years, will signify nothing at all to us, nor shall we be one jot the better for them, and to be altogether careless and negligent of that Affair, by which we must be concluded either the most happy, or the most miserable, of all Creatures for ever? To shew the extreme Folly of this kind of Temper, put the Case that you had nothing in the World to concern yourselves about but only your Body, would not every one count you mad, if they saw you taking mighty Care for the cloathing or adorning some single Limb, as for Instance, your Hand or your Foot, and yet so regardless of the rest, as to leave them quite naked and exposed to all the Inconveniencies of Wind and Weather? Or if they saw you extremely solicitous about a Scratch in your Finger, and yet altogether unconcerned at a deep Wound in your Side, which, without speedy Succour, might prove mortal to you? Why, in good earnest, every whit as foolishly and as unreasonably do you act, when, having an immortal Soul to provide for as well as a Body, you spend all your Care upon this, and take no Thought for the other; when you think no Pains too much for the preventing or getting rid of some small temporal In-

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conveniency, that may affect your Bodies, and yet will hardly employ a Thought how you may escape the everlasting Damnation both of your Souls and Bodies in Hell-fire.

Ay, but, you will say, there is a great deal of Difference between this Life and that other, which you talk of. The one is present, and we are sure we must provide for the Conveniencies of it, or else we are miserable; but the other Life we know little or nothing of: however, it is at a great Distance, and therefore we cannot be presumed to be so immediately concerned about it, especially when such a Concernment will contribute nothing to our present Enjoyments, but will rather disturb them. Give us the present, and let those that will take Care of what is future.

Ay, but, my Brethren, do we act thus in other Cases? Have we not in all the Purchases we make, in all the Costs we lay out, nay, in all the Projects we drive on in the World; have we not, I say, some Regard to the Time to come, as well as to the present? Certainly every wise Man will consider his future Condition, as well as that he is now in; and especially when it is such a Condition as he must live in for ever, and that either extremely happily, or extremely miserably; whereas the Life he now leads will be gone in a very few Years at most: That which is now future, will

will some time be present, and shall we not have other Thoughts when it comes to be so? Shall we not be of another Mind when we come to die? Shall we not then sadly reflect upon our past Carelessness of Eternity, because, forsooth, it was then in Futurity? Shall we not then wish we had been less solicitous about our Bodies and the Affairs of this World, and more minded the Concernments of our Souls? But neither indeed is the Care of securing our future Happiness so impertinent, or so insignificant to our present Life, as we make it. On the contrary, it hath a mighty great Influence upon the comfortable enjoying of ourselves in this World. He that hath taken all prudent Care to secure his eternal Estate, must needs lead an infinitely more easy, peaceful, and happy Life, than they who do not. All the cross Accidents and Misfortunes that happen to him (and God knows, no Condition of Life is free from them) are hereby sweetned and made more supportable. He goes to his Work, and minds his worldly Business more chearfully; his Enjoyments are more sincere, and undisturbed, and free from the Allays of Bitterness, and Grief, and Vexation: Whereas the Man that hath this great Work still lying upon his Hands, the very Fears and Apprehensions of what will come upon him hereafter, (which he cannot for his Life rid himself of) will frequently disquiet him,

him, and render his Condition, in the best of outward Circumstances, very troublesome and uneasy.

But what if this Talk of Salvation and Damnation in another World be but a mere Fable? What if there be no such Things, but they are only the Dreams and Fancies of melancholy People, or the Fictions of crafty Statesmen and Priests, the better to bring People under their Government? Why should we then be at any Pains to deny ourselves any present Satisfaction for the Sake of them? Pray let us first see some Demonstration of the Truth of these Things.

Tho', I hope, there are no Persons professing Christianity, that will talk at this rate; yet it is to be feared, that there are some, who in their Hearts do much doubt of the Truth of those Things we are speaking of. But to such Persons, instead of offering them Demonstrations to convince them (as indeed Matters of this Nature are not capable of being demonstrated in a strict Sense, tho' yet, I doubt not, there is such Evidence to be given for them, as, in a considering Man, will create as full and strong an Assent, as if they were really demonstrable. I say, instead of offering them Demonstrations) I shall only propose a Question or two, to be seriously considered by them, before they abandon themselves

selves to a total Neglect and Unconcernedness about their spiritual Condition.

First, I would ask, Whether there be not some Probability that these Doctrines are true, *viz.* that there is another Life after this; that there is a God, who will bring every Man to account for his Actions past, and reward him, or punish him, according to his good or evil Life? Whether all the Testimonies, drawn from the holy Scriptures, the solemn Declarations made by our Lord Jesus, who came down from Heaven to ascertain us of these Things, and the many Miracles he wrought for the Confirmation of them, his own visible Resurrection from the Dead, and Ascension into Heaven; as likewise the many Arguments that may be drawn from the Notions of our own Minds, the Justice of God's Providence, and the Consent of all Nations, in all Ages, and of all Religions, *Jews, Turks, Pagans,* as well as *Christians*: I say, whether all these do not at least amount to a Probability that these Things are true? Now, if it be confessed that these Things are probable, will any Man in his Wits think it reasonable to live as if he was certain there was no such Thing? Must he not rather conclude, that it is really his wisest Way to do his Endeavours to secure his own Share of that future Happiness, and to avoid the Punishments that shall then come upon wicked Men, since he acknowledgeth

ledgeth that it is likely, that it is probable, there will come a Time of such Happiness and such Punishments?

But, secondly, if this be too much, if it will not be granted that there is so much as a Probability in these Things, I would only desire to know, whether it is possible they should be true. This, sure, the most impudent Atheist in the World will not deny: Or if he doth, he must shew that it implies a Contradiction they should be true, that they have in them a plain Repugnancy to the common Principles of Reason, which sure none will affirm.

If now it be but granted, that it is possible there should be another Life after this, wherein virtuous religious Men shall be for ever happy, and the Sensual, the Wicked, the Profane, for ever tormented: I say, Is it not a Man's Interest that he should provide accordingly? Would not a Man, in common Prudence, take some Pains to secure his Interest in that State; and doth he not run a desperate Risque if he do not? For tho' it were odds there was no such State, yet what if there should prove one? What a Condition were the Man in then?

It is true, in other Cases, where Things are not likely to come to pass, we do not often think it reasonable to make Provisions against them. But here the Case is of such a Nature, is of such vast, unspeakable, infinite Importance to us, that the very Possibility
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of its happening should, in all Reason, put a Man upon the using of Means for the preventing Hazards, especially when the Means that are to be used are such as will not in the least make his present Life more uncomfortable, or deprive him of any true real Pleasure, or Convenience, or Satisfaction: But, on the contrary, as I said before, will increase his Happiness even in this World. Tho' there was no Heaven, no Hell, a Man loseth nothing that lives as if there were, but is rather a Gainer by it: But if there should prove a Heaven and a Hell, a Man loseth infinitely that lives not a religious Life, for he is damned to all Eternity.

Thus you see, that tho' we were even Infidels, and did not believe another World, yet it would concern us to live as if there was.

But Oh! how must this Concernment be increased, when it is not only possible, nay, when it is not only highly probable, but when it is absolutely certain that all these Things are true! that there is *verily a Reward for the Righteous*, that there is a Hell for the Wicked, and that there is a *God that judgeth the Earth*. And that all this is so, we may be as certain, as we are certain that we shall all die: And when that Time comes (as how shortly and suddenly it may come, we know not) Good Lord, in what a Condition shall we be, if we

have made no Provision for our eternal State!

Oh therefore, my Brethren, let us trifle no longer! let us squander away no more of our precious Time in Idleness, or Pleasure, or Sensuality, or a Course of worldly Business, to the Neglect of our immortal Souls, and their everlasting Interests; but let us presently enter upon our great Work; *the working out our own Salvation, the making our Calling and Election sure*, by breaking loose from all our Sins that hold us in Captivity, and seriously giving up ourselves to the Service of God in all those Ways which Jesus Christ hath chalked out to us, *adding to our Faith Virtue, and to Virtue Knowledge, and to Knowledge Temperance, and to Temperance Patience, and to Patience Godliness, and to Godliness Brotherly-kindness and Charity*; knowing, that if we do these things we shall never fall, but an Entrance will be ministered to us abundantly into the everlasting Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ: To which God of his infinite Mercy bring us all, for the Sake of the same his dear Son,

To whom, &c.

S E R.



SERMON XVII.

ROM. ii. 28, 29.

*For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly ;
neither is that Circumcision, which is out-
ward in the Flesh. But he is a Jew, which
is one inwardly ; and Circumcision is that
of the Heart, in the Spirit, and not in the
Letter, whose Praise is not of Men, but
of God.*



FOR the understanding the Sense of these Words, and what Use we are to make of them, we must look back to what the Apostle has been discoursing in this and the former Chapter. His Design in both these Chapters, is to set forth the great Degeneracy and Corruption that all Mankind, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, lay in, both as to their Manners and Principles ; and consequently the Necessity of God's setting on foot a new Dispensation, in order to the Reformation and Salvation of Men,

and that was the Faith of Jesus Christ, without which it was impossible, either for Jew or Gentile, to plead a Title to God's Mercy.

He begins with the *Gentiles*, and shews largely how horribly blind and ignorant they were in the Matters of God; how false and superstitious their Religion and Worship; and to what an Height of Wickedness and Impiety, as to their Practices, they were arrived to, so that they were altogether inexcusable before God.

But it might be said, the *Jews* were not in this deplorable Condition: They were not Strangers to the true God, nor ignorant of his Worship. God had made known his Will to them by a Revelation from Heaven, and had adopted them for his own Children. And they bore the Mark of their being in Covenant with him in their very Flesh, besides abundance of other Advantages that they had above all the World. So that they had great Reason to believe themselves safe, whatever became of the *Gentiles*. Those poor People indeed they owned to be in a wretched State; but as for themselves, who were the People of God, and were able to teach his Will to all the rest of the World, they sure could not be in Danger of miscarrying.

This was the Plea that the *Jews* made for themselves, and it is handsomely represented by St. Paul, in the 7th Verse of this
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second Chapter, where he begins to apply his Discourse to them.

Behold, says he, thou art called a Jew, and restand in the Law, and makest thy Boast of God, and knowest his Will, and approvest the Things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the Law; and art confident that thou thyself art a Guide of the Blind, a Light to them which are in Darkness, an Instructor of the Foolish, a Teacher of the Simple, having the Platform of Truth and Knowledge of the Law. All this the Jews said of themselves: And St. Paul doth not deny but that they might say it, both with Truth and Reason. But what then? Were they therefore in a better Condition, as to their spiritual everlasting State, than those poor Heathens whom they so much despised? No; he tells them plainly, in no wise, but rather far more inexcusable, forasmuch as they did not make a right Use of this Light and Knowledge that God had afforded them above all other Nations. This Law, that they so much gloried in, had no Influence upon their Hearts and Lives. They lived as lawlessly as if God had never revealed his Will to them. Their Practices were quite contradictory to their Pretences and Profession; and this their own Consciences could not but reproach them with, and condemn them for. For what greater Reproach can there be to a Man, or what can more aggravate his Guilt,

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than for him to pretend to be able to teach others, and yet not to teach himself? To preach that a Man should not steal, and yet to steal himself? To abhor Idols and all idolatrous Worship, and yet to be guilty of as great Impiety against God another way, viz. committing of Sacrilege? To make his boast of the Law, and yet to dishonour God; nay, and to make his Name blasphemed among the very Gentiles, by his open and scandalous Violations of that Law? And yet this was the Case of the Jews, as St. Paul chargeth it upon them in the 2d Verse of this Chapter, and the four following.

And then, as for the Business of Circumcision, which they laid so mighty a Stress upon, as that which was the Seal of their Covenant with God, and that which entitled them to his Mercies and Favour, he tells them in the 25th Verse, that *their Circumcision would indeed profit them if they kept the Law; but if they were Transgressors of the Law, their Circumcision was made Uncircumcision*; that is to say, that Circumcision was indeed a Sacrament instituted by God for the entring that People into Covenant with him, and for the sealing and conveying the Benefits made over by that Covenant to all those that were circumcised: But then it was upon this Supposition, upon this Condition, that those who were so circumcised, did perform the Terms which that Covenant required

quired of them; that is to say, did live in the Practice of inward Purity and Holiness, and Obedience to God's Commandments, which were the Things signified by Circumcision. But if they did not this, they were so far from reaping any spiritual Benefits by their Circumcision, that they had as good *not have been circumcised at all* (that is the Meaning of his Phrase of their *Circumcision being made Uncircumcision*.) Nay, as he goes on in the next Verse, the Heathens themselves, if they lived better than the *Jews*, if they were more pure and holy, and more obedient to the Laws of God written in their Hearts, than the *Jews* were, tho' they had no Circumcision in their Flesh, yet were they, in a true Sense, more properly *Jews*, that is to say, more truly *Children of Abraham*, and entitled to the Promises of God, and the Benefits of the Covenant made with him, than the carnal *Jews*, who had the Mark of Circumcision upon them. For, as he concludes in the Words of my Text, *He is not a Jew, who is one outwardly; neither is that Circumcision, which is outward in the Flesh: But he is a Jew, who is one inwardly; and Circumcision is that of the Heart, in the Spirit, and not in the Letter, whose Praise is not of Men, but of God*. As if he had said, Every one that is born a *Jew*, and is circumcised, and, as far as the outward Characters and Badges of *Judaism* go, can make a fair Title

v. 25.

v. 26.

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to the Promises of God, is not therefore a true Jew, is not therefore a *Son of Abraham*, to whom the Benefits of God's Covenant do appertain; nor is that the true available Circumcision, which is external, that Mark which is imprinted on the Flesh: But he is the Jew, the *Israelite indeed*, the true *Child of Abraham*, who shall be accepted of God, tho' he be not so by Birth; who, in the Purity and Integrity of his Heart, yields Obedience to those eternal and substantial Laws of Holiness and Righteousness which God gave to the *Jews*: And the true Circumcision, that will stand one in stead, is that of Him who cuts off all Superfluities and Pollutions that are spiritual; who hath that Law of Righteousness, of which Circumcision is the Sign and Seal, imprinted on his inner Man, his Soul and Spirit: Not he who hath obeyed it in the Letter only, by being circumcised outwardly in his Flesh. In a Word, the true *Israelite* is one, *whose Praise is not of Men, but of God*; who aims at more in his Profession of Religion, than barely the entitling himself to the Favour, and Countenance, and outward Privileges which that Profession may procure him among Men; for he makes it his main Business to approve himself to God by a serious Endeavour in Thought, and Word, and Deed, to observe his holy Commandments.

Thus

Thus I have given you a plain Account of St. Paul's Discourse in this Chapter, and of the Sense and Meaning of the Words of my Text.

But it may be said, What doth all this concern us? We are neither *Jews* nor *Gentiles*, but *Christians*, and therefore have nothing to do with what the Apostle here discourseth concerning them.

I answer, tho' the Apostle here particularly addresseth his Discourse to the *Jews*, yet the Reason of his Words is of eternal Truth in all Religions, and doth concern us as well as them. For do but change the Word *Jew* in the Text into that of *Christian*, and the Term of *Circumcision* into that of *Baptism*, and those other outward Duties and Privileges which we (and yet not without great Reason) do set so high a Value upon, and the Text will fit us at this Day, as well as those Persons to whom St. Paul did immediately direct his Discourse. The Truth is, it is to be fear'd, that many of us Christians do approach too near to the *Jews* at that Time in our Notions of Religion, and think ourselves true Disciples of Christ, and to have a Right to all the Promises of the Gospel upon the same, or no better Grounds, than those *Jews* that St. Paul here disputes against, thought themselves the Children of *Abraham*, and entitled to all the Benefits of that Covenant which was made with him. For

as they believed themselves secure of God's Favour and Acceptance, merely because they were *Jews* outwardly, that is, had all the external visible Characters of *Judaism* upon them, so do we too often presume upon an outward Christianity, which how speciously soever it looks, nay, tho' we ourselves are imposed upon by it, (as thinking it will serve all our Ends) yet is it indeed rather *in the Flesh, than in the Spirit*; and the Praise of it is more of Men, than of God.

It will, I hope, be worth the while to run over the several Heads or Instances of this outward *Judaism*, the Particulars that the *Jews* in *St. Paul's* Time rested so much upon: And to see how exactly the Principles of many Mens Christianity among us do answer to them. For from this it will appear how much we are concern'd to have a Care of such Principles, and to take other kinds of Measures of Religion; unless we mean to be content with the Shadow of it instead of the Substance, and will build our Hopes of Heaven upon an airy and fantastick Foundation.

I. I begin with that Branch of outward *Judaism*, which *St. Paul* doth so much insist on, viz. *their placing their Confidence in being the natural Seed of Abraham, and being circumcised, and having the true Religion and Worship of God among them.*
Which

Which Privileges gave them so great an Opinion of themselves, that they despised all the World besides; nay, they verily thought, that in Virtue of those outward Advantages they should certainly be saved, let them lead what Lives they would. It was a known Maxim among them, and is still extant in their Books, that every *Israelite*, if he continue so to his Life's End, hath his Portion in the Kingdom of God. Nothing but Apostacy from the Faith, could deprive him of it. So great a Value they thought God had for the Merits of their Father *Abraham*, that for his Sake he would not suffer any of his Seed to perish (meaning that Seed which was promised by *Isaac* and *Jacob*.) And it is this Notion of theirs that St. *John Baptist* doth refer to, and tacitly reprove in that Speech of his to the *Jews*, when they came to his Baptism; *Bring forth*, says he, *Fruits meet* ^{Matt. 3: 8, 9.} *for Repentance, and think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our Father.* (They thought that that alone would preserve them from the Wrath to come.) No, says he, *for God is able even of these Stones to raise up Children unto Abraham.*

But now, tho' one would think this should be so groundless a Presumption, that none but a conceited *Jew* should be guilty of it, yet, in truth, do many among us support ourselves, and build our Hopes of God's Favours upon the very same, or no better

better a Foundation. I pray what great Difference is there (I speak as to the inward Virtue or Merits of the Thing) between being natural-born Jews and Children of *Abraham*, and being born of Christian Parents? Between an outward Circumcision, and an outward Baptism? Between an external Profession of the Law of God given by *Moses*, and an external Profession of the Gospel of Christ? And yet are there not too many of us, that hope and expect to be saved merely on Account of these Things? Ask several Persons upon what it is that they ground the Hopes of God's Favour, and what Title they can plead to the Pardon of their Sins: Why, the best Answer they can make, is, They thank God they are not Infidels, but born and bred in a Christian Country: They were baptized into Christ, and are Members of an Orthodox Church, where Religion is professed in its Purity, and they have never departed from this Profession, but believe as their Teachers would have them; and therefore they doubt not of a Right to all those Promises that Christ hath made to his Church.

Far am I here from denying, much more from slighting or undervaluing the great Advantages of being born and educated in such a Country as ours. I own with all my Heart, not only the Expediency, but also the absolute Necessity of Baptism,
and

and a visible Profession of the Christian Religion. These are Things, without which we cannot be saved, in an ordinary Way. And, I bless God most unfeignedly, and so, I hope, do we all, for the unspeakable Mercy he hath vouchsafed to us of this Kingdom, in having the Gospel of Christ, and the Worship of God more purely taught, and more sincerely administered among us, than in most Parts of Christendom; and therefore infinite are our Blessings and Privileges above what the heathen World hath any Notion of. But then, for any of us to rest upon these Things, and to think ourselves good Christians, and Heirs of Salvation, because it is our Lot to be born and educated in such happy Circumstances, without taking any Care ourselves to make a good Use of them, is just the Folly of a Man, that, being born to a good Estate, riotously spends it all, and yet thinks to die rich. Happy are we that we were baptized in our Infancy, and trained up to the Profession of a holy Religion. And Woe be to us, if we trifle away these Mercies of God, and abuse that Grace which was given us for our Improvement in all Christian Virtues, to the Purpose only of a vain Presumption of God's Favour, without contributing our most earnest Endeavours to our being qualified for it. Baptism and the Profession of an holy Religion, are most unspeakable Blessings;

sings; but yet they were not granted us, or required of us for themselves, or that we should rest upon them alone, but for further Ends, *viz.* that we might be obliged hereby to forsake the Devil and all his Works, the Vanities of the World, and the sinful Lusts of the Flesh, and follow the Example of our Lord, into whose Discipline we were baptized, by dying daily to Sin, and living unto Righteousness. If we do not make this Use of our Baptism and visible Profession, they will signify nothing at all to us. To conclude this Head, we may truly say of these Things what St. Paul here in this Chapter said of Circumcision, and those other Jewish Privileges that he is here talking of, *viz.* *that they do verily profit, if thou keep the Law of Christ: But if thou be a Transgressor of that Law, thy Baptism is no Baptism, thy Christianity is no better than Heathenism. For he is not a Christian that is one outwardly, neither is that Baptism which is outward upon the Flesh; but he is a Christian that is one inwardly, and Baptism is that of the Heart, in the Spirit, and not only that according to the Letter of the Gospel.*

II. Another Principle of outward Judaism, (as I may call it) in which the Pharisees and other Jews in St. Paul's Time were apt to rest (and which was indeed a Degree

Degree higher than the former Instance I mentioned) was *their being skilful in the Knowledge of their Law*. This our Apostle in this Chapter takes notice of, when, reckoning up those Things that the *Jews* had so great a Value for in themselves, he names their *having a Form of Knowledge*, v. 19, 20. *and being able to be Guides of the Blind, and Instructors of the Ignorant, and Teachers of Babes*. And indeed, such was the Genius of that People at that Time, that by how much any of them did exceed in Knowledge and Skilfulness about the Mysteries of their Law, and the Traditions of their Fore-fathers, by so much the better *Jews* they took themselves to be, and the more acceptable to God, and by so much the more they despised their Neighbours that were inferior to them in this kind of Knowledge. And hence came that great Conceit the *Pharisees* and *Scribes* had of themselves, and the great Contempt that, upon all Occasions, they expressed of others: *This People, say they, that knoweth not the* Joh. 7. 49. *Law, are cursed*, as you find them speaking in St. *John's* Gospel. Hence it came, that instead of practising the Law in their Lives, their whole Study was taken up in Speculations about it, in finding out Subtilities, and Mysteries, and Curiosities, that were above the Capacities of ordinary Persons; in which Matter we have at this Day extant

extant in their Writings abundance of Instances of their Diligence.

And are there not just such a sort of Christians among us? Are there not some in our Days that make Christianity little more than a Business of mere Speculation, or a Set of Orthodox Opinions, or a more than ordinary Knowledge of the Mysteries of God? Are there not too many, who read the Word of God indeed, nay, and perhaps, with a great deal of Care, if not Niceness and Curiosity, but yet by no means with an Intent to better their Lives thereby, by no means to regulate their Judgments in any Points of Faith, or their Manners in any Points of Practice; but merely for the confirming them in some Notion they have taken up, or the establishing some Doctrine, that the Party they are engaged in are oblig'd to maintain? Others, I am afraid, may study the Scriptures to another Purpose, which is altogether as unaccountable; that is to say, merely for the Sake of the Phrase and Language they there meet with; which, when they are well acquainted with, they do so wretchedly misapply in their religious Talk, that, in truth, what is admirable Sense and Reason in the holy Books, is little better than Jargon and Cant, when it comes out of their Mouths. With these Men to be a good Christian, is to be able to dispute learnedly

learnedly about Articles of Faith, and to be wonderfully Orthodox in their Opinions, and to have so great a Knowledge in the Points that are now controverted among Christians, that they can enter the Lists for the Cause they have espoused against any Adversary that opposes them. With others of them, Christianity runs much lower, for it is but talking warmly and zealously in Scripture Phrase and Language about Matters they never gave themselves much Trouble to understand; and then who can doubt of their Love to God, and their Zeal for Jesus Christ?

The Men that have these Talents, are apt to think meanly enough of those that have them not. Those plain simple Christians, that heartily believe their Creed, and endeavour to live honestly among their Neighbours, and serve God as well as they can, but yet trouble not themselves with those high Points of Speculation, nor with the Divisions of Christendom, this sort of Men (God help them) are, in their Opinion, but poor weak Christians, too much under the Dispensation of Morality, and not yet arrived to the saving Knowledge of Jesus Christ.

But sure this sort of Principles, and these Notions of Religion, where-ever they are found, are but a Branch of the old *Pharisaism*. These kind of Men that I have described, how knowing soever they are in the

the Myſteries of God, are but *Jews*, I ſhould ſay, *Chriſtians outwardly, and their Praise is of Men, and not of God.* The true inward Chriſtianity ſinks down into the Heart, is a vital Principle there of all holy and good Actions, makes a Man a new Creature, and ſubdues every Thing in him that ſpeaks Oppoſition to the holy Diſcipline of our Lord Jeſus; but was never intended to flutter above in the Brain, and to fill his Head with Notions and Speculations, and there to leave him, with his Affections and Inclinations, as deeply engaged to the World, and the Fleſh and the Devil, as ever they were before. O this is the worſt Representation of Chriſtianity that can be! *They are not the Hearers of the Law (ſays St. Paul) but the Doers of it, that ſhall be juſtified.* And if you know *theſe Things (ſays our Saviour) happy are ye if ye do them.* And whatever Knowledge of Chriſt any of us may pretend to above our Neighbours, yet *hereby (ſays St. John) we know that we know him if we keep his Commandments. But he that ſaith he knows him and keepeth not his Commandments, is a Liar, and the Truth is not in him.*

III. Another Piece of outward *Judaism*, which the Scripture often takes notice of, was, *the having an extraordinary Zeal for Things that were in themſelves indifferent, and were not commanded of God, and making*

ing it a *weighty Point of Religion to observe or abstain from those Things.* The Jews, and especially the *Pharisees*, placed a great deal of their Religion in these Matters *They loved their own Traditions* (as our Saviour tells us) *more than God's Commandments.* ^{Mark 7: 7, 8, 9.} What a world of Stir and Bustle did they make about their Phylacteries? (which were certain Scrolls of Parchment, with certain Texts of Scripture written upon them, that they tied upon their Foreheads, whenever they said their Prayers.) There was no Law of God for them (unless they forced some proverbial Allegorical Expression in the Law to speak a literal Sense, which was not intended); but yet, as our Saviour reproves them, they were abundantly more careful to have those Phylacteries about them, tied on their Heads, than to have the Law of God written upon their Hearts.

What a Matter of Conscience did they make of cleansing Cups and Platters, and washing their Hands before Meat? Inasmuch, as the Text tells us, *they marvelled to see our Saviour and his Disciples to sit down to Meat with unwashed Hands.* ^{Matt. 15. 1. Mark 7. 2.} And abundance of other Instances there is to be given of their Zeal in Matters of this Nature.

We now, that are Christians, and know better Things, are apt enough to deride

the foolish Superstitions of those People in those Days: But are not we ourselves, many of us, as foolishly superstitious? If we will go over to our neighbour Nations, where the Popish Religion is professed, we shall there see Instances in abundance transcending, I verily believe, the very Height of the *Pharisaick* Superstition. Good Lord! What Stress is there laid upon the adoring the Cross of our Lord, and resorting to the Images of our Lady, and other Saints! And, which is wonderful, all Crosses and all Images are not of like Virtue, but some better serve the Necessities of devout Adorers than others do! What a meritorious Thing is it to say so many *Ave Maria's*, and so many Lord's Prayers every Day, according to the Number of their String of Beads! What a Security do they account a slight Penance and the Priests Absolution, against all the Malignity and Guilt of their most mortal Sins! How safe do they think they are from Danger, if they have any Relicks or consecrated Things about them! Nay, in the very Point of Death, an Indulgence purchased with their Money, or a putting on the Habit of some religious Brother, to the Patron of whose Society they have devoted themselves, is such a mighty Comfort, that they can die in Peace!

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What is Superstition, if this be not? Is not this plainly to place Religion in voluntary and uncommanded Performances? Pray wherein do these Sorts of Things exceed the *Pharisees* Phylacteries, or their washing of Hands, or cleansing of Cups and Platters?

But are not some among ourselves guilty of this *Pharisaism*, as well as our Neighbours? I would to God we would lay this Matter to Heart. We all pretend to hate Superstition extremely. God give us all Grace to hate it more, for it is an ill Thing where-ever it is found. But, in good Earnest, is it not as great a Piece of Superstition, to make it a Matter of Religion and Conscience, to forbear the Use of an indifferent Thing when God hath not forbid the Use of it, as it is to make it a Matter of Religion and Conscience to use an indifferent Thing when God hath not commanded it? I dare say every one living will be satisfied that there is no Difference between these Cases, as to the Matter of Superstition.

But now, if this be so, what must we say of all those Persons that refuse Communion with us, as to our Prayers and our Sacraments, merely upon this Account, that there are some Things in our Worship that are not commanded by God, tho' yet they cannot deny but that they are indifferent in themselves, and that they are

commanded by the Laws of the Land. Let those that are concern'd apply this to themselves : And, on the other Side, I will say this to those of our Communion, If any of them think to recommend themselves to God, merely by a Conformity to the Gestures, and Habits, and Forms prescribed by the Church in the Worship of God, without any inward Devotion, or a serious Endeavour after a thorough Sanctification of Body, and Soul, and Spirit, they are as much devoid of the Life of God, as much outward hypocritical Professors, *Jews* or *Christians*, call them which you will, as any I have now represented.

But there is another sort of People among us that ought not to be forgotten, when we are mentioning this *Pharisaical* Principle of placing Religion in Things wherein God hath not interposed his Command : There are, we know, some among us, that distinguish themselves from the Neighbourhood by a particular Way of their own, both in their Habit, in their Speech, in their Gestures, in their Way of Address, in all their Conversation. You will easily guess what sort of People I mean. And these Singularities they take up upon Account of Conscience, and place some Religion in them. Now, if it be so (and if it be not so, why do not they leave these ridiculous Practices ?) I say, if it be so, where is the Difference

rence between them and the Papists; nay, and the *Pharisees*, as to this Point? How is their *Yea* and *Nay*, their Refusal of the Hat, and twenty such like Things, more excusable than the Papists Holy Water, and Crosses and Pilgrimages, or in the *Pharisees* Phylacteries, and *praying in the Corners of the Streets*?

The Sum of all this Head is this, That let us be of what Religion, what Communion we will, yet, if we can give no better Evidence of our Sincerity, than it was only a zealous Practice or Forbearance of indifferent Things, we are but under the Character that is here given in my Text of being *Jews* or *Christians* outwardly, and our Praise is more of Men than of God.

IV. Another Branch of outward *Judaism* was, a greater Zeal for Rituals and Ceremonials, tho' of God's own Appointment, than for the moral Duties of the Law. This was a main Point of the *Jewish* falsely-pretended Religion in those Days, and occasioned many excellent Discourses, both of the Prophets, and of our Saviour, and of the Apostles. Very punctual they were in observing all the positive ceremonial Precepts of the Law concerning the Worship of God. But thinking these Things to be sufficient to make Compensation for all other licen-

tious Practices they might indulge themselves in, they took no Care to observe those Laws that were of inward substantial Goodness. They *tithed Mint and Cummin*; which Things, as our Saviour saith, *they ought to do*, as being commanded by the Law; but they made no Conscience of *Justice, and Mercy, and Faith, which Things they ought much rather to have done*. They were very frequent in fasting and praying. Pray they did in *the very Corners of the Streets*. And the *Pharisee*, that our Saviour mentions, *fasted twice a Week*; which, to be sure, was there set down for an Imitation of the Practice of that religious sort of Men. But yet in their Prayers *they honoured God with their Lips, when their Hearts were far from him*. And in their Fasts *they did not cease from their Works of Violence and Iniquity*, as the Prophet testifies against them. They were zealous Observers of the Sabbath, but did not *rest from their wicked Works*. They were very free to *offer Sacrifices to God of their Herd, and of their Flock, even till he declared that he was cloyed with them, and his Soul hated them*. But they were not so free to offer to him their inward Man, their Hearts and Spirits, which was the only Sacrifice he delighted in.

Now I heartily wish it were well considered, whether we also at this Day do not frequently thus play the *Jews* with God
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Almighty. I fear there is some Reason to believe, that a great many of us are leavened with those very Principles and Notions of Religion; I mean, that we are very zealous for, and lay a mighty Stress upon those Duties that concern the outward Worship of God, but are not proportionably zealous for the inward spiritual Acts of Piety (that heavenly Frame and Temper of Mind that can alone recommend us to God) nor for the Duties that are next under it; I mean, that universal Righteousness, Goodness and Charity, that is due to our Fellow-Creatures. Hath not the World Experience of some, who would not, for any Consideration, swear an Oath in their ordinary Conversation, (and in that they are highly to be commended) that yet will make no Scruple of using very indirect Arts for the promoting their own Interests, (I will call it by no heavier a Name) when they have a fair Opportunity offered them? There are those, who are very strict in keeping the Lord's Day, and attending the publick Ordinances of that Day; but yet they are not so strict in keeping Faith and Trust, and preserving their Minds from all inward Pollutions of Worldliness and Sensuality. It is not unusual to find those Men in the World, that do, at solemn Times, receive the Sacrament with as great Devotion as is possible (and that is the most

serious and solemn Act of our Worship) and yet, within a very little Time after (perchance upon the first Temptation) return to the same Sins they religiously vow'd against, and so continue on in that Course of Life.

In naming of these Things, I reflect upon no particular Person in the World; for I am sure I think of none, and therefore can mean none. But, I doubt, the Matter of Fact is true as to all those Particulars; and therefore what must we say of the Persons that are concern'd in it? I dare not say that such Persons are Hypocrites, in the usual Sense of the Word, because it is very probable they do not perform those Duties merely for a Shew, but are in good Earnest, and verily believe that these Things alone are sufficient to the attaining of God's Favour, and the entitling them to the Pardon of their Sins, and everlasting Happiness in the World to come; though they continue to indulge themselves in such wicked sinful Practices, as their own Consciences cannot but continually smite, and reprove, and condemn them for. Such Notions Men may have got concerning Religion, and the Terms of Salvation offered by Jesus Christ in his Gospel. But tho' I will not call them Hypocrites, that is to say, Dissemblers either with God or Man, yet, I think, we ought to call them
outward

outward Pharisaical Christians, that are utterly devoid of the Life and Spirit of that Religion they do profess. I do not blame them, but commend them, for the performing those Duties that they do; and I believe, if they had not this Respect for the outward Worship of God, they would, in a little Time, grow extravagantly and enormously wicked. But yet they are exceedingly to be blamed (and if they do not amend their Lives, they will blame themselves to all Eternity) in that, to their outward Services they pay to God, they do not add an intire Resignation of the inward Man, their whole Souls and Spirits to be absolutely ruled and governed by those Laws of Purity and Holiness, that are prescribed to them in the Gospel. Without this intire Devotion of our whole selves to God, all our Services will be little better than Hypocrisy: But with it all our Frailties, and Faults, and Infirmities, how many soever they be, will be forgiven us; and notwithstanding them, we shall find Favour with our heavenly Father, thro' our Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus I have given you an Account of the *outward Jew*, that St. Paul speaks of, and shewed you how very much many of our Christian Professors do resemble him in their Principles and Practices; which was the Thing I proposed.

And

And now it will be very needless to enter into a Description of the Person that St. Paul in the Text opposeth to him, a *Jew inwardly, whose Circumcision is that of the Heart, and whose Praise is not of Men, but of God.* For we may easily form a Notion of such a Person by what has been said of the other. Let us but affix the directly contrary Qualities to him, and then we have his Character. However, to save you the Trouble of collecting it, I will give you the Heads of those Things, that go to the making up his Description.

1. First of all, the inward *Jew*, or he that is such an *Israelite* as our Saviour speaks of, *an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no Guile*; or, to speak in our own Language, a true Disciple of Christ: He is, I say, a Person, who is so far from vaunting himself, or resting in the outward Privileges he enjoys, that he draws from hence an Argument of *working out his Salvation with greater Fear and Trembling*, knowing, that by how much the greater Advantages he enjoys above others, by so much the greater Obligations are laid upon him to out-strip them in Virtue and Holiness: So as that if he do not improve those Mercies and Favours of God to the right Purposes, he is in a worse Condition than those who never had them.

2. Secondly,

2. Secondly, he is a Person tractable and docible; one that hath quitted his Mind of all its sinful Prejudices and Pre-possessions, so that he is always prepared to receive and entertain any Truth of God, tho' convey'd to him by mean Instruments, and tho' never so disagreeable to his sensual Delights and Interests.

3. Thirdly, he is a Person that doth not overvalue some Duties and lessen others, but gives every Duty to God its due and just Place in his Esteem, preferring inward Acts of Piety before the outward Service of God, yet not omitting that; and so ordering his Devotions towards God, that they are instrumental to, and great Promoters of the Duties he owes to his Neighbour.

4. Fourthly, he is a Person who endeavours to yield an universal Obedience to the Laws of God, not picking and chusing out of them those to observe, that are easiest and least repugnant to his Nature and Interests, and laying less Stress upon the rest; but doing what he can to observe them all. Not contenting himself only to observe them in his outward Actions, but endeavouring to bring his Mind and Spirit to a Conformity with them, labouring to regulate

regulate his Thoughts, Desires and Appetites by them, as well as his Conversation.

5. Fifthly, he is a Person that seeks not, designs not the Praise of Men in any thing he doth, but hath a mighty Care to approve himself to God. It is the Conscience of his Duty that is the great Spring and Principle from whence his Actions proceed, and the Hinge on which they turn. So that he is always of a Piece, always like himself; as religious and devout in private, as in publick; as careful of himself and his Actions when no body sees him, as when he hath many Spectators and Observers of his Carriage.

6. Sixthly and lastly, he is a Person that, when he hath done all, is yet humble and lowly in his own Eyes, not pretending to merit any thing at the Hand of God. On the contrary, *if he had done his whole Duty, all that God hath required of him* (which yet he is far from being so vain as to think he hath) yet he is sensible that *still he is an unprofitable Servant*; he hath done God no Good, *he hath only done what he ought to do.* And therefore far be it from him to think he deserves any thing at the Hands of God; nay, he rather desires to lay down in the Dust, and, from the Bottom of his Heart,

Luke 17.
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Ser. 17. of the Heart.

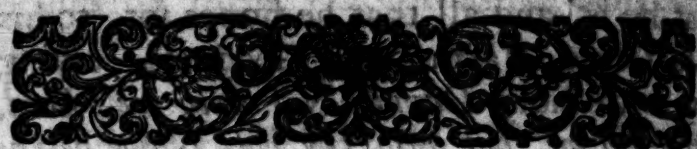
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Heart, to ascribe all that he hath, and all that he is, and all that he hopes for, to his sole Grace, Favour and Goodness, crying out with holy *David*, *Not unto me, Lord, not unto me, but unto thy holy Name be the Praise and the Glory of all.* PL. 115. 1.

He that hath these Characters upon him, is certainly an *Israelite* indeed, a true *Nathanael*, one that is beloved of God, and shall inherit the Promises both of this Life, and that which is to come. Now that we may all be such, and consequently be so happy, God of his infinite Mercy grant, &c.



S E R-



SERMON XVIII.

ACTS xiii. (latter Part of ver. 48.)

And as many as were ordained to eternal Life, believed.



HIS Text having some Affinity with those I have lately been upon, as to the Argument of it, and it being likewise commonly misunderstood, I thought it would not be unacceptable to have a fair Account given of it : And I am the more desirous to do it, because several useful Things offer themselves from it.

You find, in the 14th Verse of this Chapter, that *St. Paul* and his Company being come to *Antioch* in *Pisidia*, he went, as it was his Custom, into the Synagogue on the Sabbath-day ; where, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, were gathered together. There he preached

preached a Sermon to them, to persuade to the Belief of Christ Jesus, whom, by undeniable Arguments, he proved to be that Messias, whom God had promised to the Fathers, and by whom only Remission of Sins and everlasting Salvation was to be had. This Sermon of his is set down in this Chapter from Ver. 16, to 42.

What the Effect of this Sermon was, you have in the 42d Verse, namely, that when the *Jews* were gone out of the Synagogue, the *Gentiles* besought that these Words might be preached to them the next Sabbath-day.

But here comes a Question, which I ought to answer before I go on any further with the Story. How comes it to pass that we find here both *Jews* and *Gentiles* worshipping God in one Synagogue, and that too in an heathen Country, as *Pisidia* was? Nay, it seems by this Place, it was their constant Practice so to do every Sabbath-day.

In answer to this, you must know, that in the Time of our Saviour and his Apostles, the *Jews*, tho' they still kept their own Land, yet abundance of that Nation had transplanted themselves into other Countries: Nay, most of the great Cities were then full of them; and where-ever they came, they erected Synagogues for the Worship of God. And then, as for
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the *Gentiles* joining with them in that Worship, you are not, by these *Gentiles*, to understand the Common Sort of Heathens, or *Gentiles* who were Idolaters, for with such the *Jews* would have nothing to do; no more than *They* would have to do with the *Jews*. But it so happened always, that by Conversation with the *Jews*, where-ever they came, and by the Means of those excellent Notions about Religion, that they could furnish Men with out of their Law, a great many of the more ingenuous Sort of the *Gentiles* were brought from their Idolatry to the Owning and Worship of the one God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, and likewise to the Belief of a future Life. And all such as these the *Jews* accounted in the Number of Profelytes, and were glad to have them come to their Synagogues. Where, besides joining in the true Worship of God, they had the Benefit of hearing the Law and the Prophets read every Sabbath-day; which very Thing would strongly dispose them to believe in Christ's Doctrine, whenever it should be made known to them.

For the fuller understanding of this, you are to know that there were two Sorts of Profelytes among the *Jews*: Some that were strictly so called; and some that were called so in a larger Sense. The Profelytes, in the more strict Sense, were all those *Gentiles*

rites that were so far persuaded of the Truth of *Moses's* Law, and the Privileges it did entitle them to, that they intirely entred themselves into that Covenant, becoming circumcised, and obliging themselves to observe all the Laws of *Moses*. Now these Profelytes were, in all respects, accounted as natural-born *Jews*; and these were called Profelytes of the Covenant. But there were but few of this Sort. The Profelytes in a larger Sense, were those that so far joined with the *Jews*, as to worship the one Supream God, and to frame their Lives according to the Laws of Nature, which were delivered by God to the Children of *Adam* and *Noah*, tho' yet they never circumcised themselves, nor entred into the *Mosaical* Covenant. For by the Laws of God in the Old Testament, all People, that would come thus far, were allowed to live among the *Jews*, and to worship God with them: Nay, and in the very Temple they had a Place appointed them to worship God in, which was called the Court of the *Gentiles*; and these are those that are so often mentioned in the Old Testament by the Name of the *Strangers* among them; as particularly in the fourth Commandment, where God having ordered that they should do no manner of Work on the Sabbath-day, he adds, Neither Thou, nor thy Son, nor thy Daughter,

nor thy Man-servant, nor thy Maid-servant, nor thy Cattle, nor the *Stranger* that is within thy Gate: from which Expression the *Jews* used to call this latter sort of Profelytes by the Name of the *Profelytes of the Gate*, as they did the former by the Name of the *Profelytes of the Covenant*. Now this latter sort of Profelytes continued *Gentiles* still, notwithstanding their being Profelytes; and of this Sort there was always a great Number, both in *Judaea* and in all other Countries where the *Jews* came to inhabit. Of this Sort, for Instance, was the Centurion in the Gospel, of whom the *Jews* said, that he loved their Nation, and had built them a Synagogue. Of this Sort likewise was *Cornelius*, a *Roman* Captain in *Cæsarea*, who is called a devout Man, and one that feared God, with all his House. Of this Sort again was *Lydia*, the Seller of Purple in *Thyatira*, who is said to be a Worshipper of God. In a Word, where-ever in the *Acts of the Apostles* you meet with devout Persons, or devout *Greeks*, or worshipping *Greeks*, you are always by those Expressions to understand those *Gentile* Profelytes we are now speaking of; and that the *Gentiles* here mentioned in the 42d Verse of this Chapter, I am now upon, were of this Sort, is abundantly evident from the next (43d) Verse, where those that are called *Gentiles* in the former Verse, are

are called Religious Profelytes ; or rather, it ought to be render'd *Worshipping Profelytes* in this Verse.

Having now thus cleared this Difficulty, let us go on with the Story. The *Gentiles* having desired St. *Paul* to preach on the same Argument the next Sabbath-day ; when that Day came, as appears in the 44th Verse, almost the whole City came together to hear the Word of God. But then it follows in the 45th Verse, that when the *Jews* saw the Multitude, they were filled with Envy, and spake against those Things which were spoken by *Paul*, Contradicting and Blaspheming. Upon this it follows in the next Verse, that then *Paul* and *Barnabas* waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the Word of God should first have been spoken to you ; but seeing you put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal Life, Lo ! we turn to the *Gentiles*. Exactly did the Apostles here obey their Orders ; for, by Christ's Commission, they were first in every Place to preach the Gospel to the *Jews*, and afterward to the *Gentiles* ; and for this St. *Paul* vouches a sufficient Warrant out of the Old Testament, as you may see in the next (47th) Verse.

But what came of all this ? Why that follows in the 48th Verse : *When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glori-*

fied the Word of the Lord. And as many as were ordained to eternal Life, believed. This was the Effect of St. Paul's second Sermon.

He preached to the *Jews*, and endeavoured to convince them, out of *Moses* and the Prophets, that Jesus Christ was the Saviour of the World. But they made light of this, and judged themselves unworthy of eternal Life. Upon this he turns to the *Gentiles*, and they were very glad of the good News, and embraced it heartily, and glorified God for it, *And accordingly as many among them as were ordained to eternal Life, believed.*

This is the History of my Text, as it lies in the Chapter. Let us now examine what is the true Meaning of these last Words of it—*As many as were ordained to eternal Life, believed.*—The Sense that many of us, when we hear these Words, are apt to pitch upon, is this; That all those in that City that were particularly and by Name decreed and elected by God from all Eternity to everlasting Life, all those did, upon St. Paul's Preaching, believe the Gospel.

I do not here pretend to dispute the Doctrine of Particular Election; I account it an arrogant Thing to meddle with those Secrets. God may, or may not, have ordained particular Persons to eternal Life, for any thing that we can say on either side:

side: This therefore I do not meddle with; all that I say, is this; That whatever God hath done in this Matter, yet this Text doth not speak any thing of it. So far from *that*, that there are unanswerable Proofs to be given, that it relates to a quite different Purpose. Two Things I will here offer.

First of all, let it be considered that the Word that is here used, will not well bear such a Signification. The Word is *τεταγμενοι*. We render it *Ordained*. But if by *ordaining* we mean predestinating from all Eternity, it is certain the Word hath no such Signification, either in Scripture or any other Author. The proper *English* of it, is Ordered---commanded---appointed---put in battle array---prepared---disposed---set in readiness. Any of these Words doth express its Sense: But no where (as the Criticks do observe) is it used to express any eternal Decree of God.

The Scripture always makes use of other Words for that Business. Besides, if we should be willing to take this Word in that Sense in this Text, tho' it be no where else taken so, yet there is a main Thing wanting to make it capable of that Sense, for God is not here mentioned. It is not said, As many as were ordained of God to eternal Life, believed; which certainly had been necessary, if St. *Luke* had

meant that this Ordination was of God; for otherwise Men could not have thought of a Decree of God in this Place, considering that the Word imports no such Thing. But it is only said simply, As many as were *ῥεταγμενοι*; from whence it is plain, that we are left to the common usual Sense of that Word.

This is the first Thing. In the second Place, if St. *Luke* be supposed in the Text to have spoken of any particular Election of Persons to Salvation, then his Words must carry this Sense, That of those who heard St. *Paul* preach at that Time, as many of them as were from all Eternity decreed to everlasting Salvation, all those did, at that Time, believe in Jesus Christ. This, I say, according to this Interpretation, must be the Sense. But now see what abundance of Absurdities will follow upon this Interpretation of his Words.

In the first Place, by admitting this Sense, you suppose that all those that heard St. *Paul's* Sermon, and did not at that Time become Converts to Christianity, were Reprobates; for if all those that were predestinated to eternal Life did then believe, all those that did not then believe were Reprobates. But now this Doctrine seems quite different from the Doctrine of the Gospel, for that tells us, that all Men are not called at once, but some at one time,

time, and some at another. And I do not doubt but that several of those that then heard St. *Paul*, and were not convinced by his Sermon, might afterwards, upon further Consideration, and further Instruction, and hearing St. *Paul* preach again upon the same Argument, at last become Christians, tho' they did not believe at the first.

In the second Place, there is this Absurdity follows likewise upon this Interpretation, that it supposeth all those that then believed, upon St. *Paul's* preaching, were eternally saved; for certainly if they were particularly elected to eternal Life, they could not miscarry. But now this seems likewise very different from the Sense of the Gospel; for Christ hath told us, that *many are called, but few are chosen*: That is, a great many may give in their Names to Christ, and take upon them the Profession of his Religion; but few are those that do approve themselves true, sincere, choice Christians, such as shall be thought worthy of eternal Life. It is too much to say (I am sure it is more than we can prove) that all those that believed the Gospel upon St. *Paul's* preaching, did infallibly go to Heaven. It is probable there might be several among them, that tho' they then believed, yet either did not persevere, or did not bring forth the Fruits of the Gospel in an holy and pure Life. Now

if there was but one Man in all the Company, that fell under this Censure, it quite destroys that Interpretation of the Text we are now speaking of.

But in the third Place, I urge this. *St. Luke*, that wrote this History of the *Acts of the Apostles*, tells us here, that upon such a Sermon that *St. Paul* made, all that were ordained to eternal Life, believed. We now would expound his Words, that all that were predestinated to eternal Life, believed. The Thing I ask now is, whether, according to this Exposition, we do not make *St. Luke* to say a great deal more than he knew? For how could he pronounce (tho' we suppose him present at the making of the Converts) that all those particular Persons, that were then convinced by *St. Paul's* Doctrine, should infallibly be saved; and all the rest of the Hearers, that were not then converted, should be infallibly damned? Sure he could not pretend to know any thing of this; for we have reason to believe that he knew no more about the final Condition of particular Men, than the Apostles of our Lord did. And yet none of them pretended to make any such Judgment concerning the particular Converts that came in to them. For the Election of God concerning particular Persons (if there be any such) is only known to God. The
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Conclusion therefore is, that it is extremely improbable, if not impossible, that St. *Luke* should mean any such Thing as we would fasten upon his Words.

But what then is the Meaning of his Words? *As many as were ordained to eternal Life, believed.* Why, to that, I say, the whole Thing depends upon the Translation of one Word, and that, as I told you, is *τεταγμενοι*. We render it *Ordained*. But our Translators, if they had pleased, might have pitched upon three or four other Words, that would better have expressed the Signification of it, and have cleared the Sense beyond all Exception. This Word, if you will consult the Usage of it in Authors, cannot be more naturally rendred than *fitted*, or *prepared*, or *set in order*, or *disposed for*. Take now any one of these Rendrings, and it will fully hit the Sense of my Text, and avoid all those Absurdities that I have been speaking of. The Case before us is this; The *Jews* put away the Gospel from them, and judged themselves unworthy of eternal Life. The *Gentiles*, on the contrary, glorified God for the good News that eternal Life shall be offered to them; and accordingly, as St. *Luke* here tells you, as many of those *Gentiles* as had fitted and prepared themselves, or were set in order, or disposed for eternal Life, all these did, upon St. *Paul's* preaching,

preaching, believe the Gospel, and became Christians. If you remember, in the 9th of *St. Luke*, our Saviour speaks of some Persons that were not fit for the Kingdom of God; and such would not believe in him. But now these People were fit for the Kingdom of God, and therefore they did embrace the Gospel as soon as ever they heard of it.

This now, I dare venture to say, is a natural easy Exposition of this difficult Text; and that which, if you will stand to the Judgment of the most learned Expositors, is the only true Meaning of it. But here is nothing in all this, of any eternal Decree of God concerning any particular Man's Salvation, (nor indeed was there any Reason to expect it) which was the Thing to be proved.

Having thus given you a full Account of this Text, I now come to draw some Inferences from it by way of Application. And the first Thing you may take notice of from hence is this, That all Men are not equally prepared and disposed for eternal Life; for you see plainly by this Text, that some were unworthy of eternal Life, and others were fitted and disposed for it. If you ask a Reason of this Difference in Men, the Text will thus far give you it, that this Difference in Men, as to their Fitness and Unfitness for eternal Life, doth

not

not proceed from any Decree of God concerning them, but purely from their own voluntary Management of themselves. Those that are here pronounced unworthy of eternal Life, it is not said of them, that God had made them so, or that he had decreed them to be so, but that they made themselves unworthy; and by Parity of Reason, we may say the same Thing of those that were prepared for eternal Life: They, by well improving that Grace which God had already given them, had made themselves fit and qualified for the receiving any further Discoveries of God to them, that should direct them to eternal Life. All our Fitness or Unfitness for the Kingdom of Heaven, as far as we can learn from the Scriptures, depends wholly upon this single Point, of our using, or not using, our natural Powers, and that further Grace and Opportunities he bestows upon us, to the right Purposes, that we are in our own Consciences convinced we ought to use them to. Whosoever doth heartily endeavour with an honest Mind to approve himself to God, by observing all those Things which, by the present Light he hath, he judges to be his Duty, every such Man is fitted and prepared for the Kingdom of God. But whosoever espouseth any Interest contrary to his Conscience, or engages himself in any Course of Vice or Wicked-

Wickedness contrary to his known Duty, every such Man doth put away the Grace of God from him, and renders himself unworthy of the Kingdom of God.

In the second Place, another Thing I observe from these Words, is this; That all those that are fitted and prepared for eternal Life, will certainly embrace the Gospel and become Christians, whenever that Gospel is fairly proposed to them; *As many*, saith the Text, *as were set in order for eternal Life, believed.* God Almighty never meant to deliver such a Gospel to Mankind, as that all indiscriminately, both good and bad, should be equally capable of perceiving the Evidence of it, and being persuaded by the Motives that it offered. This would have been to over-rule Mens Wills, and to have made Faith not to be a Virtue, but a Mathematical Science. But God so ordered Things, that there should be sufficient Evidence for the Truth of his Gospel to all good Men: But yet, not such Evidence as would convince those that were obstinately bad. And this is that which our Saviour hath often Occasion to mention in his Discourses. He tells us of some that could not believe; and he gives us the Reason why they could not, because they were Slaves to Lust, and Passion, and Interest. But he delivers it as a general Proposition (*John* vii.

vii. 17.) that whosoever will sincerely apply himself to do God's Will as far as he knows it, every such Man shall certainly be convinced of the Truth of his Doctrine, that it is from God. And to this Purpose is that famous Parable of his, which is recorded by no less than three of the Evangelists, concerning the Sower that went out to sow good Seed in his Ground. The Sum of that Parable is this, That tho' the good Seed of the Gospel was sown upon all sorts of Ground, yet it took Root in none but in the good Ground; that *That* was prepared before-hand for the receiving of it: But where-ever the Seed was sown in that sort of Ground, there it brought forth in some Twenty, in some Thirty, in others an Hundred-fold.

And therefore, in the third Place, to observe this further, we may be fairly enabled from hence to give a Reason, why there are so many Unbelievers and Infidels among us at this Day. If we find several among us that make light of the Christian Religion, and talk contemptibly of our Saviour and his Doctrines, as, God knows, there are such as these to be met with, What are you to conclude from hence? that there is no Reason, no Argument, no Evidence to be offered for Christianity, because these Men, who are acknowledged to be Men of Wit and Parts, make

make it their Business to run it down? This is that indeed they bear you in hand with: But it is the falsest Conclusion in the World. Alas! you are much mistaken in your Men; they never much applied their Heads to examine these Things. They have, perhaps, got out of some lewd Books, and from their lewder Company, some Common-place Heads, with which they think they can disparage Christianity; and it is likely they have Wit enough to set off those Things to Advantage: But as for serious Thinking and putting Things together, and making a solemn Judgment of what is true or false in those Matters, as in the Presence of God, and as in a Business wherein their everlasting Salvation or Damnation doth depend; I say, as for this, you may assure yourselves, these Men never did it, nor are capable of doing it: It is not in their Natures to give themselves so much Trouble (such a Fatigue, as they will call it) as such a Work will require; and therefore you may be sure that their Infidelity doth not proceed from any real Want of Evidence, or Arguments, for the Truth of the Christian Religion, but from this, that these Men have so wretchedly abused their Faculties, by Debauchery and ill Practices, that they have made themselves unworthy of eternal Life, as St. Luke here expresseth it.

And

And the Truth of this I am so confident of, that I dare appeal to you all about it. Did any of you ever in your Lives know a Man amongst us that had the Confidence to assert, that he believed nothing of Christ's Religion, that you did in your Consciences believe to be a serious and virtuous Man? Have you ever known any Man that made it his Business to live virtuously, and soberly, and godly in all his Conversation, according to the Methods that the Light of Nature would teach him? I say, Can you name that Man in all this Nation, that thus feared God, and made a Conscience of all his Actions, that was not a sincere Believer in Jesus Christ? I dare say such a Man is not within the Compass of your Knowledge. And if it be so (as I am confident it is) that Unbelief that is found among us, is not to be imputed either to the want of Proof of the Christian Religion among us, or to any Decree of God that hath passed upon those Unbelievers, but merely to their ill-managing themselves, and their being pre-engaged in obstinate Habits of Vice and Wickedness.

In the fourth Place, from what I have delivered about this Text, we may be able to give a fair and rational Account of the quick spreading of the Gospel thro'out the World upon the Apostles preaching of it. It may appear a Wonder, that these Pagan

Pagan Nations should so readily embrace the Gospel, when it was first preached to them; as we find it did, when yet they had been bred up in a Way so directly contrary to it. Undoubtedly there was the Hand of God in this. But God usually brings his own great Works to pass in the ordinary Methods of Nature; and there was something of that here. For so had the Divine Providence ordered the Matter, that the Minds of the *Gentiles* had by Degrees been prepared for the Reception of the Gospel at the Time when the Apostles were sent to preach it. So that there was not such a Leap from their Paganism to Christianity, as one would at first imagine. For thus stood the Case; It pleased God, in the latter End of the *Jewish* Commonwealth, to suffer the *Gentiles* to break in upon them. They first became a Prey to the *Babylonians*; afterwards to the *Greeks*. While they were under the *Greeks*, their Scriptures, which had been before locked up in the *Hebrew* Tongue, were translated into *Greek*, which was then the universal Language. After this, about 40 Years before our Saviour, they were conquered by the *Romans*, and then they became a *Roman* Province. Now these several Conquests were the Occasion that the *Jews* became more mingled with other Nations, than ever they were before.

So

So that, as I told you in our Saviour's Time, all the great Cities in the World were full of them; and in every City, by the Indulgence of the Government, they had their Synagogues. Now by this means the *Gentiles*, having every where Opportunity of conversing with the *Jews*, and having likewise their Scriptures in the common Language, many of them were, in all Places, by the Blessing of God, converted from their Pagan Idolatry; and not only so, but, by reading the Scriptures, and hearing them read in the *Jewish* Synagogues, were likewise brought to some Expectation of the *Messias*, which was there promised. So that abundance of them were prepared, and were in Readiness for the Belief of the Gospel, whenever it should be preached to them; and of such as these it is that my Text speaks.

That I have not given you any wrong Account of this Matter, appears plainly by this, that all along in the *Acts of the Apostles*, you will find, that that great Harvest of the *Gentiles*, which the Apostles reaped in every Place, was chiefly made up of these *Worshipping Gentiles* that I am now speaking of. These were the Men, that in every City were so forward to give up their Names to Christ's Religion. And the Apostles were aware of this, and accordingly you find they always

chose those Places to preach the Gospel in, where there were *Jewish* Synagogues, and so not improbably a great Number of these *Gentile* Profelytes: Such was *Babylon*, and *Rome*, and *Corinth*, and *Antioch*, and *Ephesus*, and *Philippi*, and *Thessalonica*, and a great many others. And that is the Reason likewise, that in *St. Paul's* Epistles to all these *Gentile* Churches, which were of his planting, there is so much said concerning the *Jews* and the Law of *Moses*, and the No Obligation of it, and such other Things. All this had been impertinent to the *Gentile* Christians, had they not been tinctur'd with the *Jewish* Notions about these Matters.

In the fifth Place, to draw this Matter nearer to ourselves, you see, by what I have said, how much all this Affair of being a Christian, or not being a Christian, depends upon the Principles and Dispositions that a Man's Mind is possessed with at that Time, when he comes to consider about the Choice of his Religion.

The Inference that I draw from hence, is this; Of what infinite Concernment it is to all those that have Children or young Persons about them, whose Education they are to look after, to take Care that their Minds be seasoned betimes with good Principles, and that there be put in them some Sense of God and Religion, and another Life,

Life, in their tender Years. If this Care be taken, they will, in all Probability, prove the good Ground that is spoken of by our Saviour; and when they come to Years to chuse for themselves, there is little doubt to be made, but that they will voluntarily and heartily espouse the Religion of Jesus Christ, and will find all the Reason in the World to do so. But if no Care be taken of them, but the Weeds of Vice (which are natural enough) be suffered first to possess the Soil, that is, their Passions, and Lust, and Pride, and Sensuality, and Love of the World, have once taken up their Hearts, it is very doubtful whether ever they will afterwards be fit for the Kingdom of God; whether ever they will be prepared and disposed for eternal Life (as our Text expresseth it.) It must be an extraordinary Providence of God that must make them so.

In the 6th and last Place, to conclude all. Our Text tells us, that all that were disposed and prepared for eternal Life, believed. Here now is great Comfort to be drawn from hence to all sincere honest-minded Men. What tho' there be great Differences of Religion at this Time even amongst Christians, some being for one Way, and some for another, and every one telling you, that it is at the Peril of your Salvation if you do not join with

them, (tho', to speak Truth, I know of no Sect in the whole World, neither *Jews*, nor *Pagans*, nor *Mahometans*, much less *Christians*, that do so peremptorily pronounce Damnation to all those that are not of their Way, as the *Papists* do, unless perhaps you will join with them a late Sect among us, called the *Mugglestonians*) Why, I say, let these Differences be carried never so high, yet every sincere honest Man is safe all the while. Every Man that truly fears God, and endeavours heartily to approve himself to him by the Practice of all those Things that he is convinced to be God's Will, I say, every such Man may firmly depend upon the Mercies of God for his Salvation, for he is fitted and disposed for eternal Life. And God will certainly, either by his Providence, take Care that Means shall be afforded him for the coming to the right Way, if he be not already in it; or if he do not afford him those Means, he will pardon his Ignorance and Mistakes, which he could not help, and accept of his Honesty and Sincerity in doing the best he could. For I account it an eternal Truth, which St. *Peter* hath told us in the 10th of the *Acts*, in his Sermon to *Cornelius*, *God is no Respecter of Persons: But in every Nation, he that feareth God, and worketh Righteousness, is accepted of him.*

I pray

I pray God incline all our Hearts thus to fear God, and work Righteousness, that so we may find his Favour in the great Day of the Lord Jesus. This, God of his Mercy grant, for the Sake of the same his dear Son our Lord : To whom, &c.





SERMON XIX.

St. MAT'T. xx. 16.

*So the last shall be first, and the first last;
for many be called, but few chosen.*



THIS Text seems to be made up of two short Sentences; and I look upon them as proverbial Expressions, because we find our Saviour doth more than once make use of them, tho' indeed always to the same Purpose that he useth them here. As he applies them, they have a very easy and natural Sense: But as we oftentimes make use of them, the Meaning is very hard; at least abundance of People put such a Meaning upon them as is uncomfortable enough, not to say worse.

It is my Design at this Time to clear the Sense of this Text, that no body hereafter may be frighted with it; and the best Key we can have to let us into the Mean-

Meaning of it, is that Parable which our Saviour just before had been delivering, upon Occasion of which these Words come in. Here are, as I said, two distinct Sentences; the first of which seems to be a kind of Inference from the Parable, which our Saviour had been delivering, *So the last shall be first, and the first last.* The other seems to be added as a Reason for the Truth of that, *For many be called, and few chosen.*

The Parable, upon Occasion of which these Words were spoken, and which is to guide to the Meaning of them, is that famous one of the Householder, that went out early in the Morning to hire Labourers into his Vineyard; and some he hired in the Beginning of the Day, others three Hours after, others at Noon, others but just an Hour before Night. And in the Evening, when they came to receive their Wages, he ordered that that Hire (which was a Penny) which he had agreed with the Labourers for, that came the earliest, the same Hire should be given to those that came in the latest, even those that had but wrought one Hour. At which some of them murmured: But the Householder's Answer was, that he might dispose of his own as he pleased; and so long as he performed his Contract with them, they had no reason to repine at his Bounty to others.

This is the Sum of the Parable, and then come in the Words of my Text, by way of Inference from the whole Parable, *So the last shall be first, and the first last; for many are called, and few chosen.*

The Business now that is here to be done, is to give such an Account of this Parable, that there may appear a sufficient Ground for this Inference; that is to say, we are to connect, if we can, the Premises with the Conclusion; and if that be done, the Sense of the Text will be easy.

Now certainly, by the Householder in the Parable, is meant God Almighty; by the Vineyard that he had, is meant the Church in all Ages; by the Labourers that he called to work in this Vineyard, are meant all those People to whom at any time he afforded the Knowledge of his Will, and the Means of approving themselves to him. By the Penny which these Labourers were to have for their Work, is meant the Reward that he made over to all those that obeyed his Call: and whereas all these Labourers were hired but to work one Day in the Vineyard, that Day, according to what I have now said, must be a very long Day, as long as from the Beginning of the World to the End thereof; for all that Time God was to have a Vineyard, and all that Time Men were to be called to work in it; and therefore
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by those Labourers that were hired more early, must be meant those that were called to be of God's Church in the earlier Times of the World ; and by those Labourers that were hired more late, must be intended those that were called in the latter Times of the World. And both these Sorts of Men were to receive their Wages at the Evening of the Day, that is to say, at the End of the World. And when that Time came, God would make no Distinction between those that were called more early, and those that were called more late, but would bestow as bountiful a Reward upon those that came to work in the Vineyard at the eleventh Hour, as upon those that bore the Burden and Heat of the Day.

This is the general Interpretation of the Parable ; and for the Truth of it we may appeal both to the Parable itself, (which cannot, without Violence, be made to speak any otherwise) and likewise to the Judgment of the best Expositors of Holy Scripture, both antient and modern.

But now, lest any one should say that this is not explicit enough, I will endeavour to give you a more particular Account of this Parable.

I do suppose, that the great Thing which our Saviour here design'd to declare in this Parable was this, That tho' the *Jews* were far sooner called to work in God's Vineyard (that is, to be God's own Servants) than

than the *Gentiles* were, yet the *Gentiles* from henceforward should have the same Privileges that *they* had ever had. The *Gentiles* from henceforward, tho' they were not called till the last Ages of the World, should, upon their Belief in Jesus Christ, be as much God's peculiar People, as the *Jews* ever had been, and should have the same Reward at the Day of Judgment, as if they had been God's People from the Beginning: Nay, not only so, but the *Jews*, for their Unbelief, their not embracing the Gospel that Christ preached to them, should be cast off from being God's peculiar People any longer: And the *Gentiles*, that were called at the eleventh Hour, the last Times of the World, should be put into their Place, because they did believe in Christ Jesus, when the others did not. So that the proverbial Saying should here be true, *The last shall be first, and the first last*; that is to say, the *Gentiles* that were last called in point of Time, should be first in the Favour of God; and the *Jews* that were first called, should be rejected by God for a Season; not for ever rejected, but the *Gentiles* were to be preferred before them, and have their Turn first; and afterwards, when the Fulness of the *Gentiles* was come in, then should the *Jews* be again hired into the Vineyard (as both our Saviour intimates, and St. Paul expressly declares in the 11th Chapter of the

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the Epistle to the *Romans*.) So that really in this Case, as God ordered the Matter, the last was first, and the first is last; and thus we see it verified to this very Day. And this, I think, is a very clear Account of the first Sentence in my Text. If any one now should ask a Reason of this Proceeding of God's, in casting off the Body of the *Jewish* Nation from being his People, and taking in the *Gentiles* for his Church, our Saviour, in this Place, takes Care likewise to give an Account of that; and he doth it in these Words, *For many be called, and few chosen*. The Sense of which is plainly this, Christ came to preach his Gospel to the *Jews* in the first place, and to them it was sufficiently preached, and the whole Nation was called and invited to come into it. But tho' they were all thus called, yet few of them did accept of this Call, few of them did embrace the Gospel when it was thus preached. Few of them approved themselves the choice, elect, honest, sincere People of God, which they pretended to be; and therefore with great Reason was the Body of that Nation to be abandoned, and the Church of God to be gathered from among the *Gentiles*, who did more readily embrace the Call of Christ Jesus. This, according to the best Judgment I can make, is the true and the full Sense of this Text, and I
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am sure I have good Authors to vouch for it.

If you require a Scripture Proof of this, I can give you that too. I have interpreted our Saviour's Words here, *The last shall be first, and the first last*, of the Rejection of the *Jewish* Nation from being the Church of God, and the taking in the *Gentiles* into their Place: Now, for the Truth of this, I offer another Text of our Saviour's, where he useth the very same Expression: it is in *Luke, chap. xiii. ver. 30*. There our Saviour is speaking to the *Jews*; and he tells them how dismal a Spectacle it would be to them, to see *Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob*, and all the Prophets in the Kingdom of God, and they themselves cast out; and Men should come from the East, and from the West, and from the North, and from the South, and should sit down in the Kingdom of God; and then he adds, *Behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last*. This, I think, is pretty fair to our Purpose: But if it be not plain enough, mind how our Saviour himself explains it in another Text, I mean *Matt. viii. ver. 11, 12*. *Many*, saith he, *shall come from the East, and from the West, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven: But the Children of the Kingdom* (that is, the whole Genera-

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Generation of *Israel*, who received not the Gospel at the preaching of Christ and his Apostles) *shall be cast out into outer Darknes*. Sure here is a sufficient Explanation of his *last being first, and the first last.*

Again, I have interpreted the other Sentence of our Saviour, of the *many being called, and few being chosen*, to signify the general Invitation which Christ first made to the *Jewish* Nation to believe in him, and the Fewness of those that came in upon this Invitation. Now, for the Truth of this likewise, I have a Text of the Gospel to refer you to; there is but one other Text where our Saviour useth these Words, *Many are called, but few chosen*. And it is likewise at the Foot of a Parable as he useth them here; the Place is *Matt. xxii. 14.* Now I appeal to all Men, that will consider that Parable, whether this Sentence must not necessarily have the same Sense there, which we do put upon it here. Our Saviour in that Place describes the Kingdom of Heaven, or the State of the Gospel in the World, by the Similitude of a King, that sent forth his Servants to invite all those of his Royal City to the Marriage-Feast of his Son: But these Citizens, when they were invited, refused to come; made light of the Invitation, and went their Ways, one to his Farm, another to his Merchandize; nay, and the rest took
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the King's Servants and treated them spitefully, and slew them. Here is a true Description of the Usage that our Lord Jesus Christ and his Apostles met with from the *Jews*, whom he invited to partake of his Supper. Upon this the King saith to his Servants, *The Wedding is ready, but they that were bidden were not worthy. Go therefore into the High-way, and as many as ye shall find, invite them to the Marriage*; and the Event was, that by this Means the *Wedding was furnished with Guests*. Here now is a plain Account of Christ's taking in the *Gentiles* to be the Citizens of his Kingdom instead of the *Jews*. Well; after this follows the Aphorism that we are now upon, *For many are called, but few are chosen*. What can this refer to, but to the Multitude of the *Jews* that were invited to Christ's Religion, and the Fewness of them that embraced it? This was the Design of the Parable; and, I dare say, this was the Meaning of that Sentence which concluded it.

But I will offer no more Proof for the Truth of this Account which I have given of my Text, because I would no longer spend my Time in a Thing that looks like a Controversy. I think I have said enough to convince any unbiafs'd Man, that this is the true Sense of our Saviour's Words; and therefore I will now build upon it.

And

And several Inferences I have to draw from it.

First of all, from hence we see how impertinently this Parable of the Labourers that were hired into the Vineyard is made use of to the Purpose of a Death-bed Repentance. The common Application of it is this, That some Men are called earlier, and some Men later: But if a Man be but called at any Time, tho' it be in the last Moments of his Life; if even at that Time he do but give any Marks that God hath touched his Heart, tho' he hath been otherwise never so lewd, so profligate a Sinner all his Life long, why here is Ground enough for Comfort; for certainly this Man is one of those that was called at the eleventh Hour, the last Time of his Life; and he hath as much a Title to the Promises of God, as if he had begun never so early.

I do not mean here to say any thing about this Doctrine, either as to the Truth or Falseness of it; but this I say, If it have no other Ground to support it but this Parable, it is built upon a very weak Foundation; for there is not one Word of this Parable that concerns particular Persons, but only Peoples and Nations. The Day that is here spoken of, in which Men were called to do their Work, is not meant of the Term of a Man's Life, as if those that

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were called early, were those that begun to be religious betimes; those that were called at Noon, were those that were converted at the middle Part of their Lives; and those that were called at the eleventh Hour, were those that never begun to consider of their Ways till near the End of their Days: This is, indeed, the common Way of interpreting the Parable, but it is quite at random from the Scope of it; for the Day, as I told you, here spoken of, bears the same Date with the World: it begun with it, and is to end with it; and, according to this Notion of the Day, it is impossible that all Nations and Generations should be called at one Time, because they were not all at once in being, and therefore some must be called sooner, and some later. The first that were called, were the Patriarchs. These were they that were sent to work in the Vineyard early in the Morning. Afterwards, in *Abraham's* Time, God called others, by a new Covenant made with him and his Seed, and these were those (we may suppose) that were called at the third Hour of the Day. Afterwards God makes a new Call by *Moses*: And here he sets a Hedge and a Mound about his Vineyard, distinguishing the *Jews* for his own People from all the rest of the World, and that, by obliging them to a world of Rites and Ceremo-

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Ceremonies, that were never practised before : And these I take to be those that were called at the sixth Hour, and of whom it is afterwards said in the Parable, that *they had borne the Burden in the Heat of the Day* : For truly, if God's People can bear a Burden, the *Jews* did bear a great one in the very Nature of their Religion. But all this, as *St. Paul* tells us, was to *lead them to Christ*. And accordingly, at last, God Almighty did send Christ Jesus, and by him he broke down the Partition-Wall between *Jews* and *Gentiles*, and made an universal Call of all Nations. But this was not till the last Days, the last Times, as the Prophets expressly stile them, that is, the eleventh Hour of the Day, as it is in the Parable. Not that it is hereby meant that the World should end precisely within one twelfth Part of that Compass of Time after which Christ came, that it had continued from the Beginning of it : But this is all that is meant, that the last Dispensation that God would set on foot in the World for the Happiness of Man, should be the sending of our Lord Jesus and his Apostles. This should be his last Call; and after this, there should be no more hiring of Mankind (except in the ordinary Way) to work in God's Vineyard. This, as I told you before in general (but have now ex-

plain'd it more particularly) is the only true and natural Sense of this Parable. And if it be so, I appeal to all Mankind, whether it hath any thing at all to do with any particular Man's repenting either sooner or later; or whether any Comfort can be drawn from hence to such Men as have lived wickedly all their Lives long, and never think of reforming till they come to die.

In the second Place, another Thing I observe from hence, is this, That it is as impertinent to conclude from this Parable, that all Men that die in a good Condition, shall have equal Rewards in the other World, because in the Parable it is said, that those that wrought but one Hour had the same Wages adjudged to them with those that had wrought all the Day: I say, this Conclusion hath as little Foundation from this Parable, as the other Opinion I now mentioned, about a Death-bed Repentance. For, as you see, Christ doth not here speak of particular Persons that were Contemporaries, some of which might begin more early in their Lives to serve God, and others begin later. If this had been the Case of the Parable, I should have owned it would have made no great Difference in a Man's future State, whether he lived well or ill the greatest Part of his Life, provided he became a good Man, and a sincere Christian, at the last; for his
 Rewards

Rewards in the next World, according to this Parable, would be much the same in both these Cases: But, as I have over and over again said, the Parable relates to a quite different Matter, and speaks not of those that came into the Vineyard together, but of those that came in successively, perhaps many Generations one after another. And of all these our Saviour pronounceth, that it shall be no lessening of their Rewards, that some Nations were not called to be God's People as early as some others; for even those that were last called, shall as abundantly partake of God Almighty's Bounty in the other World, as if they had been his peculiar People from the Beginning.

But now, I pray, what is all this to the greater or less Degree of Glory, or the greater or less Degree of Punishment, that particular Men shall meet with in the future State, according to the different Degrees of Goodness or Badness, Virtue or Vice, that they are found in when God calls them out of the World?

In the third Place, another Reflection, which I think I ought not to pass over without mentioning upon this Occasion, is this, That, by what has been now said, you may see how very much People are out in their Application of another Parable, that I had Occasion to quote since I begun

this Discourse ; I mean, the Parable where-
in the King made a Marriage for his Son,
and invited first his Citizens, and after-
wards all Sorts of chance Customers, that
were found straggling in the High-ways
and Lanes to come and partake of the Wed-
ding Supper.

This now, among us, is commonly ex-
pounded of the Sacrament of the Commu-
nion, which we call the Lord's Supper.
And, to be sure, if any Man comes to par-
take of this Sacrament, that is not satisfied
in his own Mind that he is fitly prepared
and qualified to take it, he presently looks
upon himself to be that Guest which the
Parable mentions, which came to the Mar-
riage Supper without having on a Wed-
ding Garment : And who, being discover'd
by the King to be in this unseemly Habit,
is ordered to be bound Hand and Foot, and
cast into outer Darknes.

But now all this is a great Mistake ; the
Parable saith not one Word concerning the
Sacrament, but is quite about another Bu-
siness, as I have told you before : The
Marriage that is here made for the King's
Son, is certainly Christ Jesus his coming
down into the World in our Nature to
espouse a Church made up of all Mankind.
And accordingly all Mankind are invited
to come and partake of his Mercies. The
Jews were the first that were solemnly
bidden,

bidden, as there was Reason for it, they having been a long Time God's own Citizens. But they rejected the Invitation. Upon this the *Gentiles* were called in; and they do embrace the Call. But it happened then, as it happens now, and will happen to the End of the World, that among those that, upon the Invitation of Christ and his Apostles, came in to Christianity, and entred themselves into the new Covenant, some were not sincere, but proved Hypocrites; they professed Christ's Religion, but yet, for all that, their Natures were not changed, they still stuck to their old *Gentile* Customs, which corrupt Nature had taught them; tho' they called themselves the Children of the Light, yet they lived no better than if they had still remained in the Darknes of Heathenism. Thus, I say, it was then; and thus it is now, and will always be so. But now all these hypocritical Professors shall, at the last Day, be detected and openly punished. When God, at the End of the World, comes to take a View of his Guests, he will make a Difference with a Witness between all real and all pretended Christians. Those that have nothing but the Name and the Profession, all those shall be looked upon as not having on a Wedding Garment, but to be in the State of Heathenism. But all those that, together with their Bap-

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rism and Profession of Christ's Religion, do bring forth Fruit suitable to it; all these, I say, shall enter with the Bridegroom into his everlasting Mansions of Glory, when the others shall be shut out. This, I dare confidently say, is the true Account of that Parable; and now judge ye, whether there be any thing in it that hath to do with the Sacrament.

But fourthly, from this Account that I have given of my Text, you may see what little Reason any one hath from this Text to put the Issue of his future Hopes upon any Decrees of God concerning his particular Election, or what little Reason any one hath to be disturbed or disquieted from this Text, upon Account that he doth not know whether he be particularly elected to Salvation or no. And yet this is the common Use that this Text is put to. There is a Sort of Divinity in the World, that stands so much upon a particular Election, that, if you cannot assure yourselves that you are in the Number of those that are by Name written in the Book of Life, will hardly allow you to be true Children of God, whatever other Evidence you may produce for it. And this Text I am now upon, is one of the great Pillars of this Sort of Divinity, *Many are called, but few are chosen*; that is to say, many are called to be Christians, but yet none shall be effect-

effectually saved, but those that are from all Eternity chosen and elected of God to Salvation. And therefore, above all things, study to make that out to yourselves.

I will not now dispute the Truth of this Doctrine. It is all one to me, whether God from all Eternity did predestinate all particular Persons, that shall be saved, to Salvation; or whether he only made a general Decree, that whosoever did embrace the Gospel, and live according to it, should be saved, knowing in the mean time who would embrace the Gospel, and who would not: I say, this is not a Matter that, I think, ought to be controverted; and if we be so foolish as to dispute about it, I do not see that we are the wiser by it, but are as much at a Loss when we have done, as we were at the Beginning. But this I dare confidently say, that God Almighty never meant, that we should put the Evidence of our Salvation, or our Hopes of being happy hereafter, upon such a Point as this; but hath all along taught us other Methods for the trying whether we belong to God or no, quite different from this of our particular Election. And as for this Text, that is so much urged for the Necessity of a particular Election, I think I have already made it plain to you, that it refers quite to another Business. For all the Meaning

of these Words, as I have shewed, is no more than this, That many in those Times were called and invited by Christ to believe in him, but few did answer the Call, or accept of the Invitation. But what is this to any eternal Decree that God has passed concerning the Salvation or Damnation of particular Men?

Well; but it will be said, that the Words, if they be strictly rendered from the Original, will import more; for thus they run, if you translate them literally, *Many are the Called, but few are the Elect.* Now what can you understand by the Elect, but those that are from all Eternity particularly decreed by God to everlasting Salvation? I answer, I readily own that this is a good Translation of the Passage; but I utterly deny that this is the Notion of the Elect in this Place: Nay, I think I may say in any other Place either in the Old or New Testament. Two Notions I know of the Elect in Scripture: But I know of no more. Sometimes by the Elect are meant, all those Persons in a Nation which are in Covenant with God, and do own his Religion; and in this Sense the whole People of the *Jews* are several times, in the Old Testament, called God's Elect; and in the New Testament, all that embraced Christ's Religion are likewise called by the same Name. Both
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all the *Jews* and all the *Christians* are in Scripture stiled God's Elect, that is, in their several Turns they were chosen by God for his peculiar People, tho' yet among those, there were abundance of wicked Men and Reprobates. Now it is this Notion of Election that we believe our Saviour meant, when he said, *Many are called, but few are the Elect*. I think he designeth no more by those Words than this, that few of those that had the Gospel preached to them, did really believe in him, and enter themselves into Covenant with him.

And that this is a true Notion of Election, such as the Scripture gives of it, to omit abundance of other plain Proofs, doth sufficiently appear by that remarkable Passage of St. *Peter*, 2d Epistle, Ch. 1. ver. 3. where he begs of all Christians to give all Diligence not only to make their Calling, but their *Election* sure. Why, if the Apostle had had any Notion of an Election of particular Persons from all Eternity to Salvation, it is impossible he should ever have spoke these Words; for he knew, as well as we, that an eternal Decree of God concerning a particular Man's Salvation, would certainly have its Effect. And it had been Nonsense to bid us apply all our Diligence in the making of that sure and certain, which was already sure and certain in itself.

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It is plain therefore, that he speaks of the Election of Christians as a Thing that might fail them, if they did not give all Diligence to make it effectual; and therefore undoubtedly he meant no more by their Election, than the Privileges they were called to of professing Christianity, or their being chosen into the Number of God's People. This, I say, is one of the Notions of Election that we frequently meet with in holy Scripture; and I do verily believe, that in this Notion the Chosen, or the Elect in my Text, are to be understood.

And thus much of my fourth Inference. I now proceed to a fifth. Tho' I contend that this Sense of my Text I have given, is the true literal Account of it, and that which was principally designed when the Words were spoken, yet I do not deny but that there is another very good Sense to be given of it, and such as both the Words will bear, and is likewise more accommodable to us at this Day, than the other Sense is; But then it hath nothing to do with that Notion of particular Election, that we are now speaking of. I have told you, that I knew but two Notions of Election in the holy Scriptures. One of them I have already given you. The other I am now to speak of. When the Elect are spoken of in Scripture,

ture, there is sometimes more included in that Word, than a bare Profession of God's Religion, whether under the Law or under the Gospel; it imports, that a Man, together with his right Belief, doth frame his Life according to it. In several Passages of Scripture those are called God's Elect that do really approve themselves to him, by framing their Lives suitably to those heavenly Doctrines they have received from him; and therefore we find, that the Elect of God are frequently join'd with the Holy, with the Pure, with the Beloved of God, as all signifying the same Thing. Now in this Sense of the Word, to be in the Number of the Elect, it is not enough to be a Christian in Profession, but to live as a Christian ought to live. Taking now the Elect in my Text in this Sense, this is the Meaning of the Words, *Many, saith our Saviour, are the Called, but few are the Elect*; that is to say, Many are those that will, in all the Ages of the World, profess the Christian Religion; but yet few are those that are choice sincere Disciples of Jesus Christ. Few are those that will live up to their Christian Profession. Few are those that are *Elect and Precious*, as St. Peter joins both those Words together. In a Word, Few are those, whose Conversation is suitable to their Calling. This now, I say,

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is an honest and safe Interpretation of my Text, and such a one as better fits our present Times, than that other, which I told you was that which was principally intended. But there is nothing in it that looks towards a particular Election, nor indeed do we know any thing of that Matter.

But sixthly and lastly, to conclude all;

The last Thing I take notice of in this Text, is the wonderful Counsel of God, in rejecting the *Jews*, when the Gospel was first preached, and taking in the *Gentiles* to be in their Place; and then again, after many Ages, designing to receive the *Jews* again for his People. This I judge to be plainly said in the Words of my Text, *The last shall be first, and the first last*; that is, as I have told you, The *Gentiles*, who were last called, shall at this time have the Precedence of the *Jews*, who were first called; But then they themselves should be called, effectually called, to the Belief of Christianity after the Fulness of the *Gentiles* was come in. For tho' the first are to be last, yet called they must be, tho' they be last called, if our Account of the Words be true. It is true, this is not yet come to pass in the World, for the *Jews* are all yet obstinate Unbelievers, tho' yet they are a vast Body of Men spread over all the World. But I
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do verily believe, God Almighty would never have kept a People so long from mixing with the Nations, tho' they are dispersed into all the Parts of the Earth, had he not designed to rally them all one Day, and to re-unite them with the Body of the Church. And I do not speak this without Grounds; for, to omit other Texts of Scripture, I cannot imagine what Sense can be given to those Words of St. Paul, in the 11th of the Epistle to the Romans, ver. 25. if what I have said be not the Sense of it, *I would not, faith he, Brethren, that you should be ignorant of this Mystery, that Blindness in part is happened unto Israel, until the Fulness of the Gentiles be come in: And so all Israel shall be saved, as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away Ungodliness from Jacob. As concerning the Gospel, they are Enemies for your sake; but as touching the Election, they are beloved for the Fathers sakes. For the Gifts and Calling of God are without Repentance.* St. Paul prosecutes this Argument with a great many other Words. I grant his whole Discourse is obscure, as all Prophecies must be, till they be fulfilled. But there are Proofs enough in it to make any Man conclude, that the Jews shall at last be converted to the Faith of Christ: Nay, and more than that, that as
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their general Rejection of our Saviour was the Cause of the *Gentiles* being called into Christianity; so the Infidelity and Coldness that is to be found among us, as to the Christian Religion, will be an Occasion of bringing them over to the Belief in Christ. And by this Means will God raise the Reputation of the Christian Religion, that is so horribly sunk away among us that do profess it.

But I dare say no more in so obscure an Argument.

I pray God hasten the Coming of his Kingdom, that all Mankind, both *Jews* and *Gentiles*, may, with one Heart and with one Mouth, join together in the giving Glory to God, thro' our Lord Jesus Christ.

To whom, &c.



The END of VOL. VI.



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